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A MODERN QUIXOTE

BY

MRS. J. KENT SPENDER

AUTHOR OF "MR. NOBODY," "PARTED LIVES," "RECOLLECTIONS OF
A COUNTRY DOCTOR," "LADY HAZLETON'S CONFESSION"
"A WAKING," "A STRANGE TEMPTATION"
ETC., ETC.

"Goodness admits of no excess, but error"
—*Lord Bacon*

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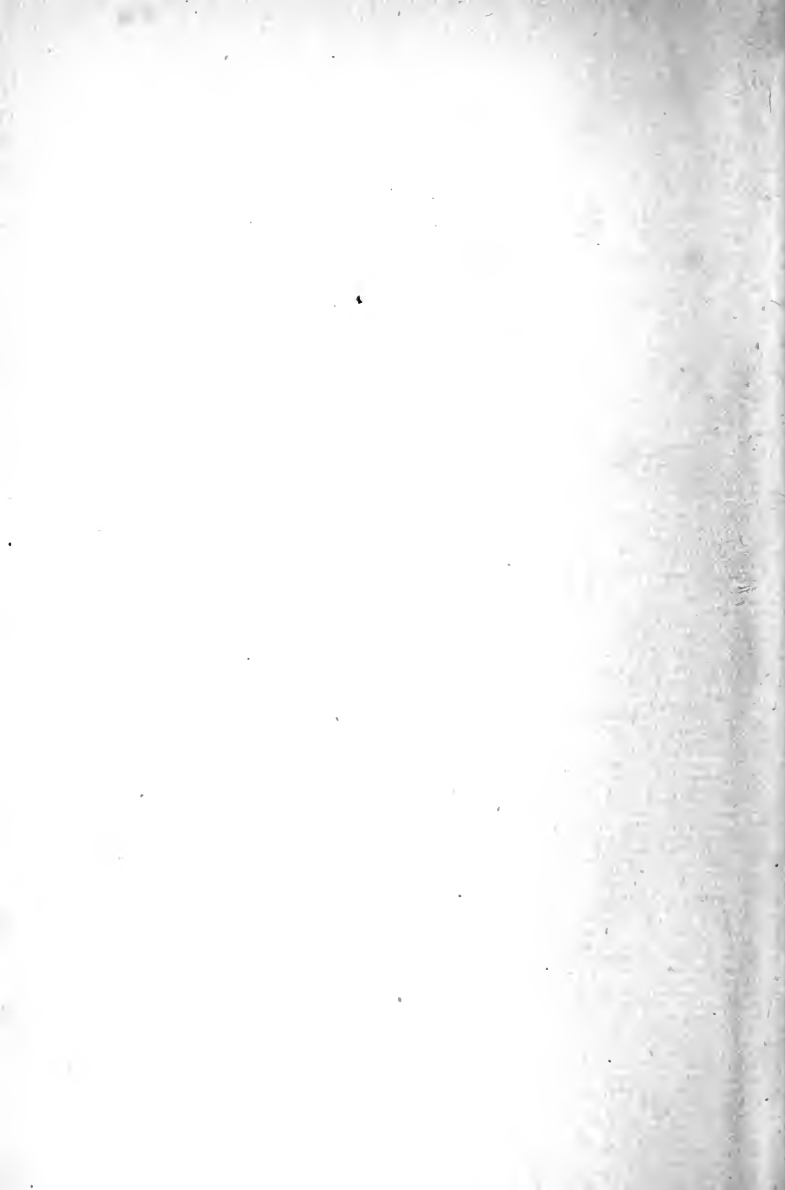
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A MODERN QUIXOTE.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

ALTHEA'S JOURNAL.

4th February. Melton Hall.—My thoughts are all in a tangle; I wonder if it will help me to try and write them down.

At one time I thought I might make a confidante of my mother—that she, being of the same sex, would understand my thoughts. But I find it is of no use: she tells me I am romantic, that if I had been born some centuries before there might have been room for my queer fancies; but that in this bustling agitated age, when every one is in haste to do the best for themselves, a woman who gives way to foolish nonsense is one who loses her opportunities.

"It all comes of reading poetry and novels," she says when she gets angry; and then I have to repress a smile, for I am not much given that way, and I am sure she troubles Mudie much more than I do.

It is true that I am very fond of *good* novels; for I think a great many of the cleverest people in the present day put their thoughts into them, and, in some respects, it is the special literature of the nineteenth century, though whether most of the authors will *live* is another thing; it is surely something to have influenced your generation.

What a goose I am! Already I am indulging in truisms and disquisitions; they say that is always the way with women when they try to write down their ideas. Well, I will write some rules for myself.

Let us see. Rule No. 1, "Don't indulge in truisms".

I dare say the other rules will evolve themselves as I go on.

Where was I? Oh, my mother tells me romance is out of date; it is an anachronism. It belonged to another stage of society, and women in the present day have no more right to be romantic than they have to scream or go into hysterics at the sight of a black beetle.

“This is the age of common-sense, my dear,” my mother says, shaking her head. And more than once she has added: “Pray do not let me have any more of that splitting of straws. Your father was terribly fanciful about trifles, and over-scrupulous. It wore my life out, and wrecked us as a family; that is the reason we are so poor.”

I gather that my father was always thinking of other people, losing his opportunities, and wasting his talents, which, perhaps, was rather hard on my mother. She, at least, is all there; very active and stirring and full of an energy which rather shames me. I gather, moreover, that my mother made a *mésalliance* when she married him, that he was considered to be a bit of a genius, and that he was one

of those men who, if they had taken fortune at the tide, ought to have been eminently successful. Instead of that he gave it all up: I wonder if I shall ever give it up too! He was a man who did not understand the art of living, and also was tormented by a restless conscience. I wonder if I am like him!

I am always dreaming and wondering about things—perhaps because those who brought me up had such contrary ideas. When I was a child I never could decide what was right without the fear of being disloyal to one or other of my parents. At any rate, I am saved from that difficulty *now*—the other can no longer communicate with me. Ah, if we only knew more about those whom we call dead—perhaps they are more really alive than we are—perhaps, when an odd sensation comes over me that what my mother calls success does not after all signify so very much, and when a sudden strange thought sweeps over me—altogether incongruous with the life I am leading now—per-

haps—who knows?—it may be the spirit of my father trying to influence me. Is it so altogether impossible?

Althea, take care!—you have broken Rule No. 1. What is the sense of making rules for yourself if you break them so easily? You will never learn anything from this journal if you encourage yourself in putting down your ridiculous dreamy thoughts—you ought to punish yourself by writing no more to-day.

7th February.—A dear friend who taught me a good deal—one of the governesses in the only school I ever went to, and that only for a short time, a few years ago—once advised me to keep a journal. I told her that it was my belief that such a practice only ministered to vanity. “Think,” I said, “of the religious biographies; I have always been set against the good people’s diaries by the fact that they so evidently dissected themselves, and bewailed their infirmities with the idea that their fellow-creatures would read their experiences.

If I am in a fair state of health I don't need the doctor's hand upon my pulse," I added. She laughed, and told me I was a pert child. And for a long time I have managed to do without any such introspection. My mother told me that all such things were ridiculously morbid, and one of the greatest evils to be deplored in the present age.

"We shall all of us begin to be conscious of the rotation of the earth soon, at this rate ; we shall complain of feeling our heads go round with it ; I don't want any daughter of mine to be green and yellow with sea-sickness in that fashion," she would say laughingly. "Take the goods which the gods provide for you, child, and be grateful," she would add ; "for they have given you more than your ordinary share, and you will do well in life if you do not spoil things for yourself."

So for years we went on ; I and my mother, as if life were one long game of battledore and shuttlecock (I suppose I should say lawn tennis, though they declare that lawn tennis will soon give way to

golf, which is a nuisance, as I can't play it half so well), at any rate we went in for all the amusement we could get, had our good time and were mutually pleased with each other. And then, one day, came a new state of things, which awakened this horribly restless conscience of mine. I knew somehow it was awake all the time, stirring like a chrysalis in its sleep. But, alas! it is of no use for me to try to deaden it any more; it stirs and stirs, and sometimes I find I cannot silence it. And yet how odd and tiresome that it should awake just now! Let me see!

I suppose I am what they call a very lucky young woman. I have drawn a trump card in the matrimonial market; only it is curious it was not I who drew it, it was my clever mother. I cannot deceive myself about that, for she makes no secret of it, and I am often amazed at her cleverness. Somehow *I* should never have been clever enough for it, and I am conscious of an odd feeling when I have to admit to myself that it was drawn for me.

I do not think it was right; but she is so far from sharing in my scruple, that she kisses me on both cheeks when I allude to it, and says: "My darling, I have not lived so many years longer in the world than you for nothing; of course, I have so much more experience, but, never mind, I dare say in time you will do as well."

Poor dear! our ways of looking at things are so utterly different that I have not the heart to disconcert her. She is so happy, so joyous, that I declare she looks already ten years younger. She has put on quite pretty coquettish little airs, which make me guess how she must have looked when she met my father. And she has had so little joy in her life; it cannot be my duty to damp her now. Oh no, I always feel we should be *so* tender to our mothers!

No; I cannot reflect on my good managing mother, still less have I the heart to grieve her. And yet it is all so strange; like a dream for which I can hardly hold myself responsible. I find

myself here at Melton Hall, with everybody apparently bowing down to me, though I feel sure that they backbite me when I cannot hear them. I am reminded twenty times a day by that dear, happy, triumphant, and almost juvenile woman, that I am the happiest girl in the world; that I shall have houses and carriages and all the good things which the heart of woman can desire; and if I remember that there was once a man called Solomon, who had houses and palaces in abundance, with servants to his heart's desire, and splendour in apparel, with even a queen of Sheba to worship him, and that none of these things made him happy, —I should not venture to remind her of that. People who know my mother intimately never attempt to argue with her. She always takes her stand on repeated assertion, or she falls back on her superior knowledge of the world.

Oh dear, I shall be obliged to have recourse to making another rule for myself. I will write it down before I forget it: Rule No. 2, "Never to

allow my diary to become an excuse for speaking against my relations, especially my mother”.

9th February.—The other day I left off rather abruptly. My mother would have told me I was talking foolish schoolgirlish nonsense,—and perhaps she would have been right. The difficult thing is for me even now,—perhaps because of the sort of dual education I have received,—to know exactly what is right and what is wrong.

“All that is obsolete, exploded long ago,” my mother says in fits of laughter, when I venture to propound some of my theories to her; “one would think the child had been born in the days of Noah.”

And then I feel ashamed; I do not like to say that Miss Maitland agreed with these ideas; if I do, she adds: “Miss Maitland is an old maid; these strait-laced Scotchwomen never have any sense of humour”.

Ah, well, I suppose it is as mother says,—that even the girls who marry rich widowers twice their

age, do not need people's pity. "It is all very well for fools to pretend to pity them; those who do so would, in nine cases out of ten, be glad to be in their shoes!" "People who have once tasted poverty don't pity Cræsus," she added one day almost passionately; "but, thank Heaven, dear child, *you* have not the smallest reason for regret; *you* are marrying a young man; a man who is handsome, has plenty of talent, and belongs to one of the oldest families in England."

The question is if I love the man; but I must not talk out that question with her; she considers it—how shall I say it?—as if it were positively improper for me to have such ideas.

So, oh my diary, I must come to you. Is it possible you can help me? For, indeed, I need help to see things clearly and do my duty. I was lazy about coming to you for a couple of years after I left school. Perhaps I should have been lazy still had it not been for a book which we have all been reading lately. By-the-bye, I do

think it is rather absurd for every one to rush to the library for a book just because Mr. Gladstone recommends it. I don't meddle with politics: it is my private opinion that women may have their own thoughts about which side is right in politics; —they can't very well help it if they are patriotic and take an interest in what is going on in the world; but that just now, when they can do no good because they have no votes, they will be wiser to keep quiet and try to make the peace. It is the case of the Romans and the Sabines just reversed; we, the women, have to rush in between the combatants to keep our husbands and fathers from cutting each other's throats. Here at Melton Hall when it is a wet day it would be ludicrous if it were not a little alarming. Half the room is in favour of Mr. Gladstone; and the other half calls him a blackguard, and asks horrid riddles about him. Now I do not think he is a blackguard at all, though I do not feel I am called upon to give an opinion about Home Rule. I can understand

how every young person has a secret admiration for Mr. Gladstone, because what we dread is not dying but growing old ; and his very appearance is a standing protest of youth against age. When I peeped through the bars in the Ladies' Gallery I could not help being struck by the brightness of his eyes. He was like a dear old bird, more alert and juvenile than half the younger members, and a great deal younger looking than his own melancholy portraits of younger days. One would not be afraid of growing old like *that* ; and I confess to you, my diary, I am terribly afraid of growing old. Most English matrons degenerate into a sort of pussy-cat life,—eating, drinking, sleeping and sunning themselves by the comfortable firesides they have prepared for themselves.

Oh dear, how I have broken Rule No. 1 ! Perhaps it is a good thing I have found out in time that I shall never be able to write books ; for though the public is very long-suffering and takes meekly nearly all the books which suave librarians re-

commend, especially at the provincial libraries—in despair of getting what it orders for itself—I am sure it would never put up with *my* books.

Where was I? Oh, I was speaking of the girl's diary which every one rushed after because Gladstone recommended it. It was very horrid of Marie Bashkirtseff to say some of the things she said about her mother, and her way of going on with men was simply atrocious. I hope my journal will not lead me into saying cruel, cynical things just because no other eyes but my own are likely to see it. Evil thoughts are almost as bad as evil deeds. But there was one thing I admired very much in that diary: it was the power of writing down everything just as it really appeared to her own mind. I dare say a number of girls will try to imitate that power, but very few of them will succeed; they must expect to fail at first: Marie was a skilful painter, and practice in one art makes it easier to succeed in another.

CHAPTER II.

ALTHEA'S JOURNAL CONTINUED.

12th February. Melton Hall.—I have been looking over what I have written, and find it as Miss Maitland said. All my thoughts are still in a tangle. I shall have to make another rule—Rule No. 3, “Do not write in parentheses”.

It is very queer, but I suppose it is the habit of my mind. My mother sometimes says: “You would talk very well,—and to talk well is one of the best ways of entertaining men,—if you did not run off into parentheses. Men are so stupid that they always like girls to save them the trouble of beginning a conversation—that is the mistake that provincial girls almost always make; they sit mum, and simper—men hate *that*; but you have plenty of go in you.” It makes me wince. I wish she

would not always bring the conversation round to "men," as if men were wild beasts, of different parts and flesh and blood from ourselves. It is a habit not peculiar to my mother ; but I may say in confidence to my diary, that, as the world goes on, and we think of each other first as human creatures, without always remembering the differences of sex, we may get out of it, and, if so, it will be a good deal happier for girls like me. Meanwhile I often tell myself that if I ever meet a man whose opinion I really care for, *I* shall be a good deal more particular in picking and choosing my words.

How tiresome ! I am forgetting ! I have nothing more to do with ideals : it would be wicked of me to think of them any more ; for I am engaged to be married.

If I am to cure myself of this bad habit of running on into disquisitions—the habit which always tempts us women, because our minds are untrained, and we haven't got our thoughts into right working order, so that they're always running over

and leaking, like water from broken pipes—I must begin at the very beginning, and put down, as briefly as possible, all that has happened to me since I left school.

It has been like one of my dreams—I think I said that before, but I do not know how else to express it. I have been hurried on by a will stronger than my own, and I wake to find myself engaged to a man I do not love. The question is, if I use the word rightly ; or if I am wrong, as my mother says, in the importance I attach to it. It will not help me much to try and solve that question now ; for of course I shall have to go through with it. There is a good deal to say for my mother's point of view ; besides, manifestly, I owe her a good deal.

It is really only absurd for me to repeat to myself that I do not know how it all happened ; for the clear answer to that is, that I ought to have had my wits about me, and that it is my own fault if I do not know,

For two whole years I quite believed that I was justified in breaking my promise to the kind friend who advised me to take a little while sometimes from the busy whirl of fashionable life—just a few minutes, to look into my own heart.

“My dear child,” laughed my mother when she heard of it, “if it were not for that charming peach-like colour in your cheeks, one would positively think you had an attack of indigestion. All that is ridiculously out of date; it belonged to the age of your grandmothers, and savours of Young’s *Night Thoughts*.”

She repeated that I was too introspective, too fond of analysing my feelings, and that it was a fatal habit, if I wished to have any peace in my future life.

“Poetry is one thing (and I advise you to cultivate it—it is certainly very pretty to hear you recite), but life is another,” she has said to me more than once during these two years; “many a woman has been misled by her love of poetry.”

‘It is not my fault,” she has often added, “that your poor father left us so badly off. We are poor as to money, but you are rich in other possessions.”

Poor dear mother, how much she thought of me! It was enough to turn my head when she was always telling me: “You are highly endowed; for you have beauty, your fair share of wit, you are accomplished, and can play with an expression which brings the tears into people’s eyes, and you are well-born; the blood which flows in your veins from my side of the family is some of the bluest blood; and if you will give up your romantic search after the impossible and be guided by one who knows, without seeking for blue roses, you may do admirably for yourself. Leave it to me.”

And so I left it to her.

I was hurried as it were through a series of dissolving views, visits to country houses not unpleasing to one’s imagination. I always wonder at the enthusiasm of a previous generation for a poetess like Mrs. Hemans. Generally she wrote

rhyme instead of poetry, the sort of rhyme which was suited to the atmosphere of keepsake albums ; but I admire a few of her poems, and amongst them,—

The happy homes of England,
How beautiful they stand.

I, for one, should not like to see the grounds of those stately homes cut up into lots for kitchen gardens ; and whenever I hear that one of them comes under the hammer, I feel a virago, and should like to fight some one.

Well, I enjoyed myself ; and though I was a little astonished at the expenditure into which my mother thought it necessary suddenly to launch, and once ventured to remonstrate with her ; I was quickly silenced when, with an unusually earnest face, she told me that she knew what she was about, that she was justified in investing a certain sum of money, for the large returns she expected in the future. And if the reply seemed to me a little mysterious, I remembered that I knew so little

about questions of capital and interest, and had so long been accustomed to entrust all practical matters to her, that it would have seemed impertinent of me to ask anything more about it: after all, the money was *hers*; whether it was much or little, I had nothing to do with it.

No doubt it was pleasant to have such a salve to my conscience, for it was delightful for me to let it be as she had planned for me.

I do not believe the woman ever yet existed who was quite indifferent to the attractions of dress. Even Madame de Stael, whose existence Napoleon resented because she had brain children instead of babies, thought a lot about her costume; so did Queen Elizabeth, and the daughter of Gustavus Adolphus, and Lady Hester Stanhope, and all the host of strong-minded women, down to Lydia Becker, who astonished the wise members of the British Association by advocating tight-lacing. No; I have long ago come to the conclusion that the women who pretend not to care are humbugs.

If John Knox himself had been a woman he would have cared. It is all very well or rather very nasty to talk about skeletons and worms; but as long as we live, it is surely our duty to each other to keep those horrors decently out of sight, and to keep from shocking each other even in our old age; it isn't our fault,—we didn't make the horrors; perhaps if we had had to choose, we should rather have done without them, and we can't be blamed for making the best of them. Oh, Althea, you really are incorrigible! There you are running on like a goose, and forgetting Rule No. 3!

Pull up! Pull up, and say that it was like a fairy tale (after the long dull period of shabby makeshift dresses, and the ugly frocks at school never long enough to hide your spindle legs, in the days when you looked like a Cochin China fowl) to find yourself suddenly attired like a princess. You had been told, during those years of the growing-up stage, that "beauty unadorned" was the best; but you were convinced that the man

who wrote that nonsensical couplet was a man given to sordid economies, and that he probably was a Paterfamilias, who wanted to keep the bills down. You had always envied Beauty when the Beast gave her a chest of drawers filled with any amount of lovely dresses. You were convinced in those days that he was a darling Beast, whom any girl, with an expanse of leg which she was longing to cover, would most joyfully have married. Heigho! "when I was young!" as Coleridge says, "ah, woeful when!" alas "for the change 'twixt now and then"!

I am young in years still; I suppose they would tell me I am very young; but I know; I can't hide it from myself; every day I am succumbing to influences that are not right; I am growing old in the ways of this wicked world. Miss Maitland used to say to me, and I am sure she was right: "My dear, if you let the world lay its hand on you, it will sap the heart out of you; it will begin by deadening your susceptibilities; you will soon care for no one but yourself".

Is the process beginning already? I notice that things which used to shock me shock me no longer. Is that a sign that Miss Maitland's prophecy is already being fulfilled, or is it, as my mother tells me, a proof of the increasing amiability of my character?

I cannot answer that question satisfactorily to myself. I only know that there was something dainty and refreshing in finding a continual succession of pretty and elegant dresses, exquisitely trimmed with ribbon or laces, laid ready for me every day to put on. And there was generally a capable maid to help me. In the first country house where we went to stay I overheard the hostess, Lady Monro, saying: "Poor Lydia's daughter should have the same advantages as the rest; the girl is good-looking, and may probably make a good start for herself in life". After that I thought in my anger that it would be better to refuse the maid's services.

"How can you let yourself be patronised?" I

cried indignantly to my mother ; " I would rather earn my own bread."

But she told me I was a fool to take it in that fashion ; and that as to earning my own bread, I should find that none of my talents were marketable ; girls in the present day who had to earn their bread had always to specialise, and that I had no certificates.

And then I submitted to the maid. After all it was nothing to get into a passion about. It was very pleasant, when the first rebellion caused by the revolt of one's pride was over, to be able to sit comfortably in a pretty and becoming dressing-gown, with a novel open on one's knee, and be brushed, curled, delicately powdered, and afterwards daintily clad in some becoming well-fitting dress.

As to my head, it became a perfect masterpiece of art. The maids, who, by-the-bye, are terrible flatterers, were never tired of complimenting me on the length and abundance of my hair, and some-

times I suspected them of wanting to practise on it from the various and novel ways in which they dressed it. I could not help laughing, for sometimes they turned me out like a piece of Dresden or Fontainebleau china ; and then again they would make me look as much as possible like a Greek statue, with chignon not too large, but reposing gracefully, bun-like, at the back of my head.

My mother was wonderfully clever in superintending all this ; she seemed to know by some artistic instinct exactly what suited my style. And if when we left we had to fee the maids with gold, well, if she only smiled and told me it was "all right," it was not for *me* "to make reply".

Well, after we had paid a few of our visits, in which the women whom we met had proved themselves to be courteous and obliging and the men had perhaps been a little too inclined to exaggerate the kindness of the women, she said one day, imprinting two kisses one on either side of my cheek : "My dear, you are a success ; you are not

shy; you know how to talk; so far you are an improvement on the majority of shallow, empty-headed women. But beware of being high-flown; I am here to guide and support you."

I took the opportunity of asking her if she did not think I could dispense with the services of the Abigails. I reminded her that I had always been accustomed to wait on myself,^½ and alluded, as *gently* as possible, to the expense of our present proceedings.

"How often," she answered, "have I told you that I know what I am about!" She smiled a meaning smile, and then said: "No mode of dressing the hair can really injure your style, you have such a distinct individuality of your own. There is such an amount of meaning in your face that the only thing one fears is lest you should become strong-minded,—that is what men hate."

How I should have liked to tell her that it could be of no possible consequence to me what men liked or what they didn't like, and that I could not

bear to hear them spoken of as if they were a peculiar species!

But she was looking so bright and happy, so ridiculously young, and so pleased altogether at the turn things were taking—poor dear!—that I had not the heart to contradict her.

I did not even remonstrate when she coached me up, as she sometimes did, as to the manner of using my fan—an art which she said was terribly lost in the present day—and dropping my eyes in order to show my long lashes, and then raising them again to display the brilliancy of the eyes. I should have despised myself if I had intended to do anything of the kind; but that would have been no excuse for despising my mother.

“When you want to make yourself pleasant to a man,” she said, “be sure you do not talk about deep subjects; the most handsome woman would be displeasing who had no more tact than that. Always talk not about yourself, but about them. It would be odd indeed if you could not find *some-*

thing to please them, for men are dreadful egotists. Every young man either likes to talk about his examinations, his honours, his hopes for the future, his ambitions, his huntings, his farming, his shooting or his politics. Find out what he likes and then flatter him, prophesy grand things of him; but be especially careful to let *him* do all the talking. In nine cases out of ten a man will go away with the idea that a woman is a splendid conversationalist who has said a little more than 'Yes' and 'No'. The great thing is for a woman to be a good listener."

She said all this laughingly, and I scarcely knew whether she was in earnest or not. I could only admire her adaptability, for she could be every character in turn according to the people she was with; and often I had to repeat the fifth commandment to myself to keep from bursting out with the truth when I heard her giving out opinions in public which were directly at variance with those which she had impressed upon me in private.

Once, indeed, when we reached our bedroom I tried to say something about it. But I only made her angry. "Really," she answered, "it is a pity you are so very literal and childish: there are certain occasions in society when it is impossible to be consistent; the most detestable women are those who think it necessary to be always speaking the 'malignant truth'. Heaven protect me from such a misfortune as having one of them for my daughter!"

I was silent and rather ashamed of myself. Indeed, I think it was from this time that I got into the habit of distrusting my own opinion, and yielding up my own will. I had read somewhere that we were almost certain to be right if we were ready to give up to others, especially those who had the rule over us, and that we were not likely to err if we kept on the side of self-sacrifice. It is only lately I have seen that this may lead us to become vacillating and untruthful, and end by our having no private judgment.

CHAPTER III.

ALTHEA'S JOURNAL CONTINUED.

14th February. Melton Hall.—When things happen without our knowledge—when they are somehow managed for us in that tremendous haste which leaves no time for regret, it is so difficult afterwards to explain the process to ourselves.

When I first of all met Lord Melton it was in all the rush and whirl of a London season—at balls and races, at garden parties, luncheons, concerts and theatres. I talked to him as I talked to half a dozen other men, three or four of whom my mother had let me refuse as soon as the season was over, because, as I represented to her, I did not care for any of them; and because—as I further explained—we could not possibly know anything about each other's habits, characters, or tastes after

rubbing shoulders and exchanging jokes on crowded staircases or in suffocating drawing-rooms. She smiled rather enigmatically, and told me that I was the oddest girl; but as she patted my cheek and added that they were not *eligible partis*, apparently my oddness did not matter. I told her I should be horribly bored with them; and she answered: "You have, for once, admirable sense".

But she did not answer in the same way about Lord Melton.

We met him soon afterwards at a country house; I had noticed that mother was exceedingly anxious to go there. How he came to fall in love with me and to make out that I was in love with him is the most puzzling thing; but I shall always think the wet weather had something to do with it. For it was horribly, deplorably wet. It was like Longfellow's poem—"The rain, it raineth every day". The men hung about. Though the shooting had begun they were really just as wretched as if they had nothing to kill; for they could not go in for

their usual work of destruction without getting drenched from morning to night. We women had more than enough of them—for not being able to eat like crocodiles more than four times a day, they had most of them nothing to do, and fell back for their amusement on us. My mother at first shrugged her shoulders, and said it was always the way with that sort of men. She did not contradict me when I said it was a pity so to live for material comforts as to have no resources in oneself to ward off *ennui*.

Nevertheless, she told me to exert myself. “A girl like you,” she said, “is invaluable in a crisis of this sort.”

To hear her talk you would have thought that the affairs of the nation depended on how the men amused themselves. I had to sing and play, and I thought it rather unnecessary that she should make an exhibition of my sketches. I tried to explain that I had too high an opinion of art to think anything of my own feeble efforts in either music or

painting. But she laughed, and told them that was my humility.

Everything was certainly done to amuse the men, amongst whom Lord Melton was especially to be pitied for a limitless capacity for being bored. We had charades, *tableaux vivants*, billiards, games of whist and bezique—something, in fact, to suit all tastes. The amateur performers had wonderful confidence in their own abilities, and would have been quite affronted if they could have guessed that the professionals who had been sent for from London to try to make our feeble efforts “go,” laughed at our inefficiency in their sleeves. A boundless confidence in oneself is one of the things associated with birth and wealth. I said so to my mother; but she answered that cynicism did not at all become me, and that it was every woman’s duty to make the best of the world she had to live in.

So we talked of getting up one of Sullivan’s operas.

My dresses had to be more dainty than ever, but

you must not suppose I minded that. If I was a little frightened about the expense, and wondered how in the world we were to find the money, my mother explained : " Money is money, and there are certain occasions in which one is justified in drawing on one's resources. If you are not well dressed you are despised. One of my axioms in life has always been never to obtrude one's own poverty. It is always better to be envied than to be pitied, and if your poor father had not had such fastidious notions we should be rich ; so that if you look at it in that way there is no pretence about it ! "

Oh, how it rained during that wet September ! There was a humid feeling about the atmosphere. If we ventured out the place was as spongy as moss and the few men who persevered in shooting generally came back with bad tempers, swearing at our atrocious climate.

If the sun shone for a little while it had a pale watery look, as if the " eye of heaven " had taken a

bad cold, and could only blink at us in an ashamed sort of way.

People sighed as they talked about the failure of the crops, cattle disease, home rule, and that incorrigible Mr. Gladstone—none of which seemed to be enlivening topics. Then my mother gave me a hint. Lord Melton was to be quietly diverted from talking about these objectionable subjects; for he called himself a Radical, and it might make bad blood if he was disloyal to his own set—she had promised our hostess that we would do our best to keep him in the right way.

So the cry was again amusement, and many wild things were suggested. They even talked of acting the “Cloches de Corneville”; but I was glad that my mother knew how to be firm when they talked of giving the part of Serpolette to me. The singing would have been all very well without the dancing. But my very ears and cheeks burned at the thought of having to dance in short skirts and sing the coquettish song:—

Look at me here, look at me there,
Criticise me everywhere.
I am most sweet from head to feet,
And most perfect and complete.

For once I struck, and said I would rather die than make such an exhibition of myself. And though my mother laughed, and said I ought to keep pace with my time, and reminded me that skirt-dancing was all the fashion, and that it was a compliment to my singing and gracefulness that they should even wish to allot such a part to me, she added that perhaps I did wisely in keeping out of that sort of thing. "*Your* style," she said, "is to be more dignified and aristocratic; you are right to reserve your voice for the evenings, and not to make it too cheap."

She repeated that though my voice was not loud, she had remarked more than once that it had the power of drawing tears, and that if I were to sing Sullivan's songs at all, it should be such a song as "The Lost Chord," though that of course

was hackneyed, and not such songs as Serpolette's.

I was too glad to be let off from a performance which I should have hated to trouble much about, when she continued that the men who were worth anything might flirt and laugh with the girls who sang comic songs or danced theatrical dances ; but that the girls they *married* were those who could be graceful *châtelaines*, and who knew how to keep other men at a distance. By this time I had become used to this constant talk about subjects on which I would rather have been silent, and felt as if it would have been rude for me to interrupt.

Another girl acted the part of Serpolette ; but though they complimented her on her singing and dancing, my mother did not seem in the least disappointed. She kissed me, and told me she was pleased with me twenty times a day. And though I was happy because *she* was happy, yet I was on my guard, and feared—I could not exactly tell what.

I had an uncomfortable conviction that it would

all end in something which might be against my better judgment, and which I might not be powerful enough to resist. But then my mother seemed so serenely good-tempered ; she grumbled less than I had ever heard her grumble since my father's death ; and surely it was my duty to be glad for her sake.

The end *did* come at last when she came to me one morning looking radiant, though the rain was still streaming out of doors and the cattle taking refuge under the dripping trees. She kissed me again in French fashion, and told me that Lord Melton had asked leave to pay his addresses to her child.

I flashed up, and answered angrily that that was surely a most out-of-date way of doing things ; and that if Lord Melton wished to secure me as his bride his right way would have been to have spoken to me first.

"It is *you* who generally accuse *me* of being old-fashioned," I cried ; "but this is one of the great

exceptions in which the modern way of doing things is surely a great improvement on the older."

I don't know what I suspected. It seemed to be vulgar to allow such an idea to enter my mind as that she would lead him on, and raise hopes in his mind which I might not be able to fulfil. I waited for a little while till I could feel that I had my temper a little under my control; and then I said more gently :—

"It would be a pity to encourage him; for though I have done as you wished me and tried to make myself amusing, as a duty we owed to our hostess, I have given Lord Melton no ground to expect anything else from me. It is one thing surely to help when there are a lot of people to be amused who think everything of their material comforts, and are made so miserable by a little wet weather, and quite another to think of choosing one of the deadweights for your companion in life."

"How often have I warned you against becoming satirical! It is a habit which does not become

you, and in this case is utterly meaningless. Why in the world should not Lord Melton suit you as a companion for life?"

Her voice was shrill and high-pitched. I knew instantly by the tone of it that I had said something which grieved and wounded her. And then when I gave a string of reasons, that though he was good-looking enough, he was intolerably vain, that I feared he was weak and unstable, that I did not like the set of people by whom he was generally surrounded, and that he did not in any way realise my ideal, she became terrible in her wrath.

"There you are again!" she said in that high-pitched voice which I had not heard for some months, and which always proved to me that her nerves were terribly tried. "Will you ever give it up? In spite of all my talking, it is the old, old sentimentality."

I knew she could not help it; and yet her voice went through me like a dart as she continued:—

"You sicken me with your school-girlish talk

about ideals. I should like to know if you too are not intolerably vain yourself, when you talk as if you are so immeasurably superior to all the world that you are to be the only woman to have no specks on your fruit. If Lord Melton is not perfect, will you tell me by what right you expect a perfect husband?"

My conscience answered that I was very far from perfect; but when I added that that was just the very reason, and that if we poor human creatures attempted marriage at all it seemed to me we needed a great deal of love to help us to bear with the imperfections of each other, she adopted another tone, and laughed.

"My dear," she rejoined, "one would think you had been reared in a desert island, so singularly are you out of touch with the notions of our times. Do you *really* suppose that husbands and wives in Lord Melton's station of society are likely to see too much of each other? Why, you will live as if you were always in company even when you are

at home. I know that is the sort of life he has been accustomed to lead ; and when you are in town you can manage, if you please, so as only to meet each other two or three times a week. Oh, did you not know it ? We in the upper classes have managed in this age to minimise the disadvantages of married life, whilst we avail ourselves of all the advantages. A wise man goes his way, and a wise woman hers."

"*Mother!*" I exclaimed. I knew she was excited, but I could not bear to hear such sentiments from her lips.

"Is it my fault," she retorted, "if the age has admitted that the institution of marriage carried to its furthest limits may prove a bore ? I understood you to say something of the sort yourself. The sentiments I am giving you are not *my* sentiments ; they are those of the time in which we live. You blamed me for letting Lord Melton speak to me first, and yet in some of your ideas you would go centuries back. You, poor child, would look

forward to an idyll which would scarcely outlast the honeymoon. I, who know life, would save you from disappointment. Never expect too much, if you don't want to be bored."

And then she gave me a philosophic lecture, which made me feel rather ashamed of myself. She told me, amongst other things, that duty was not poetical; and though I remembered Wordsworth's line,

Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,

and would have liked to argue that it was the same law which kept the most "ancient heavens fresh and strong," and was tempted to quote Browning, I knew it would only be irritating, and I abstained.

I did not like to contradict. And I was silent, while she especially put me on my guard against the passion which has led so many a woman into the paths of evil. A little well-regulated, moderate liking was, as she told me, the right thing with

which to commence a happy and successful married life; for that would steadily increase. The spark carefully nursed would steadily grow into a flame, whilst the passion of love would expire like a rocket, and the woman who trusted to it would find that she had wrecked her life. No; I was to be on my guard against that passion, which would so speedily burn itself out. Duty, mere commonplace duty, might seem at first very dry and unpalatable to a romantic girl like myself; but in the end it would prove its own reward, and especially if associated with carriages, mansions, parks and dresses,—everything which could delight the heart of woman.

I knew that there was something very fallacious in her arguments; but I thought it wiser and more dutiful not to talk too much just then. She was in the seventh heaven of delight, and I had not the heart to damp her enthusiasm; she so evidently believed all she said; and as I knew that sooner or later I must bring her down from the heights, I

was weak, and let her enjoy herself for a little time. Poor soul ! she had had so much drudgery and suffering, it was hard that she should not enjoy herself a little, now she was growing old ! After all, the triumph was for my sake.

“ Oh, my darling child,” she said, when she had concluded, “ you can not think how envious all the other girls will be of you.” And then (as if in the fulness of her content she could not help boasting a little) she added : “ *I* have helped you. I have done my best. I could not bear to see you suffer from the indignities of poverty as *I* had to suffer all my life. But my highest ambition could hardly have soared to so brilliant a lot for you.”

It was hard to check her in her raptures, but every word of hers jarred on me ; her triumphant voice cut me to the quick.

I said a little gravely : “ Mother, dear, you are making a mistake ; it is a mistake which hurts me. I, long ago, made up my mind never to marry without love.”

Then she reasoned with me : that we were only talking in a circle ; that I must admit I had a *little* liking for Lord Melton, a little grain of liking ; that it was easy enough to see it in my eyes when I was talking to him ; that I was only nervous about what I called love ; it was a foolish way of analysing my own mind ; that if I would wait a little bit, it would take only a little while to develop *that* into what even a nervous girl like I was would call "love".

She smiled archly as she said this. But when I shook my head, and answered that though it was true I had no dislike to Lord Melton, and that he had been kind to me, it was yet quite different from what she thought, her excitement assumed another form, and she burst into tears.

"And is it nothing," she asked, "that I have deprived myself of luxuries all these years ? Am *I* to count for nothing ? I solemnly declare to you that I have slaved as seldom a mother has slaved before. Your father would do nothing for you ; it was his idea to live on bread and cheese, and sit at

home over his books. If he had not talked as you do grandly about the ideal, till he made me, oh, so weary of all that selfish nonsense, he would not have been so devoid of common-sense as to refuse a property of which he was the heir, because the testator on his deathbed, when he was wandering in his mind, said he wished to leave it to somebody else. What did it matter? It was a great deal too late for him to rescind his will ; and when I heard that your father intended to give it all up, saying that he should be haunted and have no sleep at nights if he went against a dead man's wishes, I declare I did not know which was the most out of his mind of the two. That was just of a piece with your father leaving Parliament. A man who could make a present of a fine property to somebody else, leaving it away from his own wife and children because his morbid conscience required him to do so, would be capable of any other piece of romantic Quixotism. And therefore, of course, directly he got into the House, he took it into his head that he was troubled again with his con-

science. Oh, such a pity! They talked of him as quite a rising man; his maiden speech made quite a sensation, and then he could not be made see that the right thing was for him to do like other people and go with his party—his conscience began to want to have its own way.”

She heaved a sigh, and then she added: “Those are just the sort of things *you* would do. Perhaps it is inherited; they have just found out that everything is heredity, but why you should not inherit the good sense for which my side of the family was said to be conspicuous is a puzzle to me. But there it is; you too want to be different from every one else. *He* had resources and capabilities, and he wasted them all. You have capabilities too, but if I don’t take care you will waste them.”

I did not like to argue the point with her, for it was evidently a sore one; neither did I like to tell her that I admired my father all the more from the stories she had told me about him. Possibly if he had lived longer, I might have been a little like

him ; but I was a mongrel, partly like my father, and partly like my mother, and the hotch-potch of qualities did not make me any happier. It was the first time she had told me so much about my father ; but the effort of reviving these recollections seemed to have made her quite worn and troubled. When she lifted her haggard face and fixed her eyes on me—what anxious eyes they were!—I recognised too surely the probability that I had inherited my restless ways from my father.

“ And when I was left a widow,” she continued, pouring out her words hotly, “ did I not almost stint myself of food that my daughter should have the advantages of a brilliant education ? Did I not hide myself during the best years of my life, and go about a dowdy object myself, that I might hoard something out of my meagre pittance to let my daughter be well dressed when she should appear in that society in which her birth entitled her to appear ? I said to myself that when you made a good marriage I should be well repaid. And now,

you have not only refused good offers,—I did not reproach you for that, though if you had not been an only child there would probably have been a younger sister to bring out by this time,—but when a man appears who is well-born, indulgent, rich, handsome, intellectual, I do not say too much about the title, or the fact that he belongs to one of the best old families, for you know I am not snobbish; but when, with all these advantages,—what could a girl want more?—you must put me off with romantic nonsense, and talk like your father, about IDEALS,—is it not enough to madden me?”

Nothing could exceed the infinite scorn with which she pronounced these last words.

“Child,” she continued, drying her tears and towering above me to her full height,—for she was sitting and I was standing, and I was wicked enough afterwards to let the thought come into my mind that perhaps she had managed it on purpose, certainly it seemed to give her a sort of advantage: “Child, you do not know what it is to be

a mother, to deny yourself day after day for twenty years that your daughter should be graceful and elegant, accomplished and distinguished, to refuse her nothing, never to spend a penny more than is necessary on yourself ;” and she glanced down at her often-altered, plainly-cut, black velvet dress, which, to my knowledge, had been adapted and re-adapted to the changing fashions of the last ten years.

“ It is too hard,” she cried tragically, “ to pluck the feathers from one’s own breast, like a devoted mother-bird, and to find after all, ingratitude ! ”

The clock on our mantel-piece, which was an old one, a queer little antique thing with a figure of Saturn, struck one o’clock in the morning just at that moment ; and the excitement of her prolonged vigil, as well as her sense of her child’s ingratitude, set my mother weeping again.

I could not bear to see her cry ; and I knew that her excitement must be intense, because it was so rare for her to give way in this fashion.

“Pray, do not,” I entreated; “you always say I shall spoil my eyes, and *your* eyes are less able to bear tears, dear, for you are older,—do dry them.”

I went to her and coaxed her, and then I said that I was not ungrateful; that she knew I should always do anything I could reconcile with my conscience to gratify her wishes.

She had been weeping convulsively before, but at this she calmed herself.

“Do you love me?” she asked, looking up with her face all drowned in tears. “Then it is for you to *prove your love*; you know how I dislike fine phrases; but if you love me a little, you will prove it by your actions.”

Did she take advantage of me in that speech and in all that followed?

Oh, my Journal, I will shut you up. There are some questions it is better not to ask; and already I have broken Rule No. 2.

One generation is not like another; and if my mother humbled herself to me, almost going on

her knees to me, she was only acting up to her light, and honestly believing that she was doing the best for her child. I have tried to tell the story just as it happened. But I reproach myself. For already, in spite of my good resolutions, I have surely been imitating the bad example of Marie Bashkirtseff, and sitting in judgment on my mother. It is all the worse for me ; for I am no genius, and I always think there is an especial excuse to be made for geniuses.

CHAPTER IV.

ALTHEA'S JOURNAL CONTINUED.

16th February. Melton Hall.—Yes, I am weak, culpably weak, as perhaps my father was before me. No, no; don't let me blame him. How could he help it that he died, and could have nothing to do with my upbringing? But I have been deficient in firmness all my life. And it is one of the meanest excuses of the weak to attribute their faults to other people.

My mother's vehement grief had so entirely subsided that she met me bright and cheerful on the following morning, giving me significant glances to follow her lead; so that I concluded that, after all, it had been only an attack of the nerves, brought on by over-fatigue, and that, if I had had patience to wait, she would soon have been better.

But it was too late for me to think about that. The rain was over for an interval, and the morning sunshine looked all the brighter from the fact that it was so long since we had seen it.

Her significant smile at me when I came down to breakfast seemed to say: "See, nature knows that you are romantic, and condescends to smile at your betrothal!"

And without giving me time to speak to her alone, she said to Lord Melton across the table: "My daughter has accepted your invitation to take a little turn with you round the grounds this morning; it is all new to her, and she will be glad for you to show her the fir walk".

I understood her meaning; it was as if an order had been given me, and yet it was the first time I had heard of that walk.

I felt like a French girl who had nothing to do for herself, but only to accept the lot which her parents had prepared for her with tact and complaisance. Even with other people it was an open

secret. And if Melton is not annoyed at what has happened, if *he* does not see that it is always so, that I accept my part with indifference ; but that if I do not play up to it, my mother is always ready, either with deprecating gestures to me, or with rapid talk of her own to supply my deficiencies, he must be easily pleased.

My first idea was that he was stupid ; my next that the cloud of adulation with which he is constantly surrounded, serves to keep him indifferent to any merits but his own.

Everything seemed to combine to keep me meek and properly subservient to a will that was not my own.

For the dressmaker's bill arrived the next morning. My mother showed it to me in triumph, and asked how any girl in her senses could imagine that the whole of our very moderate income for one year could be swallowed up in paying such a bill as that, unless indeed she knew that one of us would be amply provided for in the future, and that

that one was a dutiful child who would do the best for her mother. I understood now what she had meant by the necessary outlay; and my cheeks burned with shame at the thought. And then I groaned in spirit at the amount of the bill. The materials had been inexpensive, but the *modiste* charged so much for her cut; it seemed that the simplest materials could not be made up by the best houses without the expense being altogether disproportioned to the stuffs which they had used. And yet I had some vague remembrance of hearing that numbers of these extravagant dressmakers paid little enough to the young women they employed, and that sometimes things were almost as bad now as they were in the days when Hood wrote his "Song of the Shirt".

I said something of the sort, and my mother answered that it would be time enough for me to think of all those things when I was Lady Melton. She reminded me that it had become rather the fashion for ladies of title to come out in the philan-

thropic line, to take the chair at public meetings, and even to go slumming.

She laughed as she said it ; and added silyly that I might be quite sure my future husband would give me as much of my own way as I desired ; and that, as I was an oddity, I might spend money as I liked. Money, money ! it was always money. *Would* it be benevolent to give the poor, as people called them, what costs me nothing ? I vaguely remembered a story which had been told me in my childhood of a lady married to a very rich husband, who wished to supply hungry people with food, and who had to pretend that her appetite was so delicate that she could only eat a small and delicate morsel out of every leg of mutton, so that numerous sheep had to be killed to gratify her whim and the rest given to the poor. I had admired that story in childhood, but I did not admire it now. I had read a good deal more than my mother ; and I knew that a protest had to be made against that sort of charity which creates

destitution by feeding and clothing other people. I knew that such things, without curing, often aggravated the evil. I knew too that ladies who went "slumming" for a diversion often did more harm than good.

I had even heard that the only real way to help was to go down and lead the life right amongst the people. The principle might be the same, but the mode of application must vary from one age to another. But even in the age of the Gospel, the rich man was blamed for sparing the superfluities from his table to feed his brother.

Althea, remember!—Rule No. 3! You are off again at a tangent in a ridiculous digression—ridiculous for *you* because you are a hypocrite. How can you hope to set the affairs of the world right when you cannot even tackle the problems of your own life? If your mother heard you, would she not cry out at you over the table, as she has so often done lately at breakfast and dinner, "Take care, my dear, you are getting out of your depth!"

She is under the impression that men do not like women to talk on these subjects; she tells me they like them to talk about flowers and stars. Shades of Copernicus and Newton! Fancy the Solar System being supposed to exist for the sake of supplying little ephemeral things like us with some pretty similes to please our lovers! For once I think she is mistaken, though I do not tell her about *that*. Why should I tell her that Lord Melton has already given me a laughing hint that he intends to utilise me in more ways than one? I am not only to be an ornament at the head of his table, but I am to help him to write his speeches. If we loved each other dearly would not I be delighted with the compliment? I dare say it is pretty common in the present day for women to help their husbands in some such way. And why in the world shouldn't they? They say that Daudet and Stephenson boast of the assistance they have had from the subtle thoughts of their wives. I could imagine that working together in such a fashion

must be delightful. But Percy—as he tells me to call him now, and as I suppose I must, even in this diary—proposes no such working together. I suspect he guesses that we should have too little in common.

He is wonderfully polite, and I expect to find it as mother prophesied—he already gives me all my own way.

“He is not an *exigeant* lover,” she says to me triumphantly. How can I tell her that perhaps I should have liked a lover who was a little more *exigeant*? But perhaps I have not got it in me to inspire a devout lover—perhaps I am, as my mother used to tell me—a trifle too dignified—not to say iceberg.

On the days when mother is quite jaunty and juvenile herself, she accuses me of being a refrigerator; but then adds in a comforting way that I err on the right side, and that if I could only see myself I am already quite *grande dame*, she never saw anybody more thoroughly cut out for the *rôle*

I shall have to perform in life. I don't explain that I feel sometimes as if I *had* ice running into water down my spine ; and that, therefore, it is no wonder if I look as I feel. I ought to explain that this has not been quite so usual lately. I am becoming reconciled to my lot. No doubt there was a subtle attraction to me in the idea of all the useful and important work I shall be called upon to do. All women like to be important.

But what has delighted me more than anything has been our visit to this delectable place. I stipulated for one thing when our engagement was announced in the *Morning Post*, and when I was a little ashamed of my mother's haste in announcing it, as if the fact of making it known would make it impossible for me to draw back. I insisted that the marriage should not be hurried on, and that I should be allowed the breathing-space of at least one year. She talked it over with Percy,—it is she who always acts the go-between in these cases. Percy did not seem to have taken the delay very

much to heart; and my mother told me he had readily consented on one condition—that she and I should come and pay a long visit to my future home.

It was easy enough to manage this; for Percy has a dear old lady living with him—Mrs. Armitage, his aunt.

4th March.—Of course, it is not strange to us. My mother and I have stayed before at country houses; and I have always delighted in the sense of space given by having a large park to wander about in, play tennis and golf in, ride and drive in, etc. I hope it is not the sense of possession which makes this place seem to me quite the most lovely one I have ever seen, for that would be so small and mean. In Scotland I know there are still more lovely parks, with blue mountains in the distance, purple heather and brown water of the colour of a fawn's eyes, and streaked with foaming white. But for England—good, honest, unpretentious England—Melton Park is a dream of beauty.

I did not know when we came here first which to admire most,—the green stretches of the park, with the gnarled branches of the grand old elms and oaks, or the pile of picturesque and stately buildings which had been built and rebuilt by successive generations of Meltons.

They say that no Melton is quite without this mania for building. Percy's father fell from a height whilst he was superintending some repairs. Mrs. Armitage was telling us how he regularly cracked his skull, poor man, and had to be trepanned; and after that he was not cured, but was just as eager for making some unnecessary alteration. There is a tradition in the family that a curse should always come to the Meltons through building; but my future husband is certain to evade this curse, since his passion for building takes a perfectly safe form. It seems he has entered into a compact with an artist, a friend, to erect a house in imitation of one of the houses of ancient Rome, as a queer kind of summer-house, in his grounds.

It *does* seem an odd sort of craze ; for the action of our English climate will soon destroy the frescoes on the walls. Mrs. Armitage was anxious that I should remonstrate with him about the needless expense of such a project. It shows how little the dear old lady knows of the sort of compact which mother was clever enough to arrange between us. If he is not to interfere with *me*, surely it would be most impertinent of me to attempt to interfere with *him*. Such an attempt would only bring its own Nemesis, as mother observed ; and she was clever enough to comfort Mrs. Armitage by shrewdly declaring that men must have a hobby ; indeed, she said she thought it much safer for them to be provided with a vent of that sort.

It does not seem to me that the house needs any improving. I would not touch a stick or stone of it ; I delight even in the lovely brown and sage-green moss with which Nature has industriously adorned the roof for centuries. They say it makes it a little unhealthy, and is a proof that the atmo-

sphere is a little humid. I do not mind. I like those lovely blue mists which soften the hills with their shadows in the distance. I like the weird old trees with their wizened branches, a proof of how the wind has played on them in the winters. I like that same wind to play on my face when I get away sometimes from the park for a lonely walk on the breezy moors.

It is astonishing how my mother humours me in these things. Ever since I pleased her in the one great thing she seems to have taken her cue in letting me have my liberty as much as possible in everything else.

All she says is : " It will be wiser for you not to put on your jewellery, lest there should be tramps about " .

For indeed I, who do not care much for precious stones, have been rather hampered by the number of pretty sparkling things which Percy has heaped upon me since the engagement. Mother says he wishes to make a difference between my adorn-

ments and those of the other women in the house. And so, to please her, I have to put off the gems which are "rich and rare," and to take the big deerhound as my protector while I wander for miles on the wind-swept moor. I must say they are very good to me.

And when I come back invigorated from my walk, I forget to notice that Percy is not a devoted lover, and that he likes to linger with the men in the smoking-room, rather than take the trouble to find out why he and I are not exactly the complements of each other. I forget to bother about the future, and content myself with admiring the house that is to be mine, and which seems to me perfection outside and inside.

I don't know which I like best ; I think I prefer the silent corridors with dim mysterious light, just sufficient to show the pictures of knights and dames looking down from the panelled walls. It is certainly an ancestry to be proud of, though rather a pugnacious one, as I said to my mother.

It gives me a creepy, crawly feeling to pass through those corridors into the hall before the lights are lit at night. There are halberds and helmets, suits of mails, pickaxes and maces, besides the more modern swords and shields. They tell me that antiquarians set great store on the collection. As to the staircase, it is such a charming specimen of wonderful old oak-carving made in the days when workmen had guilds amongst themselves and knew what good work was, that I do not think it would be wise to have it restored, though it is beginning to be quite worm-eaten in parts. Percy intends to ask his friend about it; he too sets great store upon that friend.

CHAPTER V.

ALTHEA'S JOURNAL CONTINUED.

6th March.—What would the world say to me, I wonder, if it knew that I was just beginning to be contented with my lot? Would it not answer that I had no right to expect anything half so good?

As I looked out of my bedroom window this morning, and watched the silver mist drawn like a veil of mother-of-pearl over the distant hills, and listened to the full-throated blackbird trying the tenderest *roulades* with which he could woo his mate, and saw by the shimmer of green over the trees that they had been touched by the magic wand of the enchanter, I felt as if I must quote those words of Browning which I did not like to repeat to my mother—

O world as God has made it ; all is beauty,
And knowing what is love, and love is duty.
What further may be sought for or declared ?

Ah! that is it. I have only to do my duty. And have I not been perplexing myself too much ?

Ought I to yield to a foolish feeling of disappointment because still, though I am engaged to be married, my life is a little solitary ? Are not other people's lives as isolated ? Every lot has its limitations. Why should my serenity be disturbed because I cannot have everything ? The law of compensation ought to lead me to expect that with all these things some extra blessings should fail me.

One of my duties is to make myself agreeable to the people here ; and so I am trying hard never to be an iceberg, but always amusing. It is harder than one would think to accomplish this duty ; for I am not much interested in any of the people. The men are pleased enough when I talk to them, and, as I try to adopt mother's rule never to talk

about my own affairs, but always about theirs, I get on with them amazingly. A few of the older ones are a little reticent, but the younger ones will pour out all their troubles directly they have a woman to condole with them. I try to give them good advice, and they tell me it does them a "deuced lot of good". Goodness knows how! I have had no experience in these things; and when one young fellow tells me that he is "broke" and another that he has "plunged" rather heavily, it is difficult for me first of all to understand their language, and next to be properly sympathetic.

Cause and effect are rather curious. It seems that the Goodwood Cup is a thing which tempts one to plunge heavily; and then there are races, billiards, cards, and all sorts of other things.

You would be amused if you heard the style of argument I adopt with these young men, as if I were taking the position of matron already; but sometimes I am afraid that in my ignorance I rather overdo it.

For instance, the other day, I said that even Zola recommended all men to adopt the gospel of work, whatever their position in society. Of course, I was only speaking from hearsay, but I found I was getting rather into a mess when the lad to whom I said it—fortunately, he was only a lad—looked at me rather curiously, and asked if I read Zola. Of course, I had to admit that I had only read *Le Rêve*, which I thought quite nice, and *The Attack on the Mill*, which had made me cry. But I saw that he did not quite believe me. He told me that it was quite the fashion for ladies to read Zola and all sorts of things now ; and that, in fact, they knew quite as much as the men, and wrote novels quite as outspoken as his, so that I need not mind acknowledging it. Afterwards when he added that it was of no use for him to talk about work, for that he had nothing in the world to do, and when I said that if I were a man I would rather break stones upon the road than be utterly idle, he only laughed, and said breaking stones

upon the road would make one speedily realise that one had not only a spine but a spinal cord, and that if he had been born into that position of life, the first thing he would have done would have been to blow out his brains after drinking himself blind first. I found that I had overrated my influence; and when I came to think of it, how could I, who had so carefully lined my nest for myself, presume to preach to other folks?

My mother imagined that she had kept all her affairs carefully locked in her own bosom, and indeed I knew it was not her fault if they oozed out. But how is it that these things almost always ooze out? We pride ourselves on being very reserved, and perhaps we forget that in some expansive moment we have communicated them as a dead secret to some dear and intimate friend, who borrows a trumpet at the first opportunity for the rare delight of proclaiming them on the house-tops.

Ah! is it, as my mother says, that I am sarcastic,

and that is a bad fault, or is it that I can't help being daily and hourly disgusted with the shams and pretensions and falseness of the life which I am obliged to keep up? I must not say this, and I must not say that, for fear it should clash with some other statement which she has made. The stories of the wonderful ancestry on her side of the family seem to me to grow and grow; and these are capped by the accounts of my poor father's genius, and the great things he could have accomplished had it not been for his fatal modesty. I have to take my cue from her just as in the old days. She does not hamper me as a chaperon, but she takes it out in other ways. Hush! hush! even to my journal, no blessing would come on me if I maligned my mother. If I could only protect her from the meaning shrugs and glances of other women, which go through me like darts twenty times a day!

I do not like most of these women as well as the men who come to this house. I ought to be care-

ful of the statement, for it reflects on me. A woman who does not like her own sex is in my opinion not to be trusted ; a women's woman (who is seldom down on her sisters) is surely to be preferred. Yet there is something rather unreal about most of these women. They ape the manners as well as the dress of the men, and, so Percy says, they don't do it well. Their neckties, he says, fidget him, because they are not tied properly. That is a small detail : so is it about their dress ; it is the tailor's fault if the waistcoats don't sit well. But there can be no occasion for them to interlard their discourse with much slang. And their laughter is so loud. They fish and hunt, and don't mind about killing things, and they drink brandies and sodas to keep Percy's other friends company.

Percy tells me he does not admire this sort of thing ; at any rate, he spends a lot of time with the people he does not admire ; and sometimes it is rather dull for me, though I should not think of

complaining. I can plainly see that I should only make a fool of myself, and feel a hypocrite, which would be worse, if I presumed any more to sit in judgment on other people. I am caught in the toils, and must take it quietly. When a net is round you tightly, partly owing to your own fault, and when you wriggle and do no good by wriggling, the best way is to sit still.

8th March.—No, I am not happy ; it is as well I should acknowledge it to this dumb paper, for it would be wicked to utter it to anything that had breath. As to my mother, she is still delighted enough for both ; she is radiantly, ecstatically happy, and I shall not have lived in vain if I cause her such delight.

I am sure I should not be so ungrateful if I had something more to do.

But my miserable attempts at art always make me discontented, though they may please other people. I used to be contented with the few pieces I could scrape on the violin, because I could make

the instrument talk to me, and it ministered to my dreams. But now that I realise how the story of my life is over, and I can have no more to do with dreams, I compare my poor attempts at playing with the playing of Joachim or Sarasate, and feel only that I should like to burn my fiddle, and that perhaps it would be the best way ; because, if I burnt it, Percy could pay for some of the best performers to come down and entertain us with their music.

And yet, that old grumbler, Carlyle, who used to be so hard on his fellow-creatures for always whining after "hap-hap-happi-ness," preached the doctrine of work. It did not seem that the work proved a panacea for all evils as far as *he* was concerned, but, at any rate, he *tried* it ; he worked like a galley-slave. And, perhaps, when we come to be judged, we shall be judged by whether we have *tried* our best ; so Miss Maitland thought, she said there were such things as grand failures. So too Browning thought ; at one time I fancied his poems

had been like a revelation to me, and would help me so much; but I find I cannot read them just now, without getting even more discontented with myself; he was fond of paradoxes, and thought that failure was the grandest sort of success. I won't quote the lines here, because I don't think it is a good thing to quote too much in one's diary,—it is an excuse for laziness. Also I was rather disconcerted; for when I spoke of them to my mother, and tried to make her understand that consciousness of failure here is but an evidence of triumph in the future, she tut-tutted, and said it was a proof that the poor man was quite off his head.

9th March.—It seems that Robert Browning does not stand alone in the privilege of madness. There is a good deal of talk in the house about this interesting madman who arrives to-day, and who is to furnish us with plenty of amusement. It does indeed seem strange that a friend of Percy's, who was with him at Winchester and afterwards at Christ Church, and who fought half his battles when they were little

fellows, (being broad-shouldered, tall and strong, for his age), that this man, who is as well endowed, mentally as physically, should think it his duty to give up a large fortune and to work with his own hands for a living. Quixotic they call it here, and some use stronger terms and say it was an action worthy of Bedlam. There is a good deal of laughter in the drawing-room and smoking-room about the Fabian Society, to which they say he ought to belong. Certainly it *does* seem to be eminently ridiculous; but I thought it was going rather too far, when one cynical old man spoke of the ladies' speeches on platforms about Socialism and other advanced questions as the "whinnying of tiresome old mares". I told Percy that I could not allow my own sex to be spoken of in such a disrespectful fashion; and he laughed more than ever, and tried to explain that the ladies who made the speeches were mostly old maids. I answered that I had heard to the contrary; they were either nice-looking widows or pretty girls; and he patted me on the

shoulder, and said that the way in which I took up the cudgels for my own sex was a very becoming one, and made me look handsomer than ever.

It was the first quarrel of the sort we had ever had; but even then, he would not take me seriously. Will he ever take me seriously, I wonder? I have hitherto been called good-tempered, but it is dreadful to have to admit that a real quarrel with one's *fiancé* might not be a bad thing, since it might help to clear the air.

I wish we could have a few explanations about some things, but he takes care never to allow me the slightest opportunity.

Percy thinks no end of this friend of his; I believe they used to go about arm-in-arm together when they were at Oxford; but Mrs. Armitage says Percy has altered a good deal since then. I could not, of course, ask if the alteration were for the better or the worse. We were both of us very guarded; but I could not help gathering, from observations which the dear old lady let fall, that she

thinks as I do—it is a pity that her nephew is surrounded by so many flatterers. Yet, as she hints, he is so good to these men, paying their debts so often that it is no wonder they almost worship him. Good nature is one of his strongest characteristics; and it is, as she says, so easy to abuse good nature, till at last a man has no one to tell him the truth.

“Thank heaven, he will have *you*, my dear, his little truth embodied. I thought of that directly I heard your name; they ought to spell it Alethea,” said the dear, trusting creature, not seeing that I had to turn away my eyes, because they had filled with sudden tears; oh, why is life so difficult?

She does her nephew no more than justice when she says he is very good-natured. I have a proof of it just now. For whether the suggestion came from Mrs. Armitage or not, it is kind of him to propose that I should take lessons from his artist friend when he comes to Melton Hall next week. He promises he will break it to him by degrees. My

fancé laughs at me for what he calls my passion for perfection. He acknowledges that it is really very sad for me to have no good violinist within hail to help me to conquer the double-stopping which just now prevents me from playing Raff's Cavatina. Meanwhile it may be a little comfort to me to get some assistance with my painting, as my last water-colour drawing had to go under the pump, and looked like a horrible imitation of one of Whistler's harmonies in grey; whilst I had laid violent hands on my last *chef d'œuvre* in oils, and cut it to pieces for fear my mother should insist on showing it.

This was all sad enough; and it was all the kinder of Percy to think of it, since I had long ago found out that he did not take the slightest interest in my painting, or in the fiddle. He liked my voice because he said it was pretty and a part of myself, and he liked an English ditty. He was interested in building and in frescoes as a part of architecture; but he was really no judge of painting,

and had a splendid picture-gallery of his own, so that, of course, my daubs could not signify to him.

I answered that if Mr. Colville thought there could be any chance of my making progress I should be delighted to have some hints from him ; but that my mother overrated my talents ; and I had doubts myself whether it would be worth wasting any further time in the pursuit of an art in which I might never excel.

“ Oh, you may trust Colville,” he answered ; “ he lives in a palace of truth—it is the only disagreeable trait in his character.”

I winced, because something in his speech reminded me of what Mrs. Armitage had said about myself. I was convinced that I should dislike Mr. Colville for many reasons. He, it seemed, was known to be the soul of truth, and I was only a disgraceful sham : he had given up all his property at the dictates of his conscience ; and I, poor, miserable I, was selling my conscience for *what* ? I dared not answer that question.

Of one thing I was determined—I would be very silent with Mr. Colville ; if I were really a sham, he should not shame me by finding me out. No ; for many reasons it would be wiser for me to keep a mask on in his presence. I was determined to have as little to do with him as possible. I even felt as if he must be a prig ; and from childhood I had always hated prigs.

14th March.—I have seen the man I determined to dislike. For days he seemed determined to act like a prig, secluding himself in his own apartments. When, however, Percy determined to speak to him, and represent it as a personal favour that he should come downstairs, it appeared that he could behave like other people. He did not talk much to the younger women, but devoted himself to Mrs. Armitage, which shows he has excellent taste. For a dearer and sweeter old thing, looking as much as possible as if she had walked out of a picture, it would be impossible to find.

I understood the secret of Mr. Colville's ascendancy over Percy directly I saw him. Something in the balance of his head—the way in which it was held erect, which was eloquent of his power over other men ; the perfect equilibrium of his nervous frame ; the searching eyes, which met all other eyes fearlessly, with a reasoning as well as a smiling glance,—all told me that he was a man who might read the heart, and with whom, indeed, it might be well to be on one's guard.

They could talk against him before he appeared ; but it is quite odd how the wagging of tongues is silenced now.

He has surrendered his fortune, it is true ; but there is something victorious in the way in which he has stripped himself of it. He means to be meek ; but his meekness could never be servile, and does not mar that poise of his head on his shoulders, nor that eagle-like eye which makes some of the other men quail. I must pull myself up. It is only because my story is so thoroughly over that I

can afford to give this description even to my journal without fear of being misunderstood.

But, seriously, I can believe from the manner and appearance of this man, and the gestures which come natural to him when he speaks, that he had all the power over the masses that his admirers said he had, besides being one of the most popular men of his college.

CHAPTER VI.

ALTHEA'S JOURNAL CONTINUED.

15th March. Melton Hall.—It has been a very strange life to me ever since we have been here : it is so like a play ; and yet there is nothing very dramatic about this courtship. Poor mother, she has had a hard life of it till now ! It is evident that she enjoys her part in the play—acting it almost to perfection. The call-boy's bell never comes too suddenly for her ; she trips on the scenes always smiling and self-satisfied, only sorry to retire when it is time for the curtain. And there is a captain who pays great attention to her. Such a funny man ! O wicked pen, it is again running away with me. I do not know anything about the secrets of the confessional ; but I should think the difficulty about women would be that they would always be

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tempted to tell about other people's sins instead of their own. If I were a priest, would I not scold them for it? I do not mean to take life too seriously ; I give you notice that I shall do nothing of the kind. But I do think that when I am constantly reminded that my husband will endow me so plentifully with good things in life, that the other side of the compact might be remembered ; —I am sacrificing to him my youth, my illusions, and all my powers of loving.

My mother hints that I am a weak and sentimental fool when I talk like that. Perhaps mother is right. Love varies. If the days for the unusual devotion which one reads of in books are over, would it not be senseless in me to demand it? If it had been I who had tried to interfere, if I had attempted to make or mar my own life,—then I might reproach myself. But now it has been all settled for me.

And the more one comes to think of it the more one sees how difficult it is. If we are not perfect

ourselves, what right have we to demand an ideal standard from the companion of our lives? It used to be said that marriage was the only vocation for women, and that it was the whole of our lives ; whilst it is only a part of the man's. But have we not changed all this? or has not time changed it? So that it is impossible for us to try and put the clock back, or get back to the good old-fashioned ways. They have invented a grand name for all these changes; they call them evolution, but sometimes I think I would rather have lived in our grandmothers' days.

Still, if it is a result of this slow evolution that women are becoming every day more like men, and that marriage is beginning to be to us, as well as to the men, merely an accident in our lives, why continue to be so romantic about it?

This is a lovely spring : I think I have never seen any so lovely ; I think so every year, and mother laughs at my enthusiasm. She says that if I had no trees to look at, I should have been like " Young

John " in Dickens' story ; and that if my mother had been a washerwoman, I should have spent my spare time, like him, in sitting amongst the clothes hung out to dry, and fancying them "groves". She is very merry at my expense because she is so happy herself, and says one tree would do as well as another for a sentimental girl like me.

I wonder if I shall feel so when I grow middle-aged.

Heigho ! Just at present I feel as if I would rather die than live,—to have my impressions deadened and all my illusions destroyed. They are dying one by one, and a part of myself is dying with them.

The flowers are coming out already in the garden, crocuses and hyacinths succeeding the snowdrops. The season is so forward that in another month the lilac may be budding ; why should it be so evanescent when it is so sweet ? Only six weeks or so, and the laburnums will be dropping their wells of gold, and chestnuts covered with fairy-like candles.

But oh ! I think I like the guelder-rose best of all because of association. I love all these flowering trees on account of association ; because, when I was a little girl, and we had to live in London, where my father was working hard, my nurse used to show them to me in the London squares. All the smoke of London could not blacken the flowers on the trees when they first came out in all their glory. We lived in Russell Square,—I may tell it to you, my journal, but not to any one else, it was so terribly unfashionable ; I used to be puzzled when I was a child to hear mother say that nobody lived in Russell Square ; and yet, somehow, it seemed to be pretty well populated. In those days I dreamt a dream, which I mixed up with the guelder-rose,—I used to call it snowball then ; and I never thought of my dream again until this morning, when the recollection made me shed bitter tears. Perhaps I am a fool to put down such a childish dream here, when the engagement which I have entered into should have closed the door

against all such dreams for ever ; but some power out of myself seems to oblige me to record it. I dreamt that I was dead, and was playing with other children in the fields of Paradise ; it was lovely enough there, with the crystal streams, the green grass and the flowers with which we little ones pelted each other as we ran about beneath the shady trees. I did not want to go back to smoky Russell Square, and be scolded as mother scolded me nearly every day because I did not know how to hold myself bolt upright. And so I was very miserable when I found out that it was all a dream, and I had to go back to the dull earth and the duller London streets, so often foggy with what we called a "pea-soup" fog. Then the angel who had been playing with us and taking care of us comforted me. She picked a fair white blossom from one of the trees, and placed it in the bosom of my dress. It was the blossom which I called "snowball," but which I know now to be the guelder-rose, and she said : "Dear child, you must

go away now for a little while; but if you keep pure and good this blossom will never fade. You will know it for a sign, and by-and-by, when you come back to us, you can show us your blossom."

It was only a foolish, childish dream. What a goose my mother would call me, if she found me shedding tears over it;—she would say it was so uneducated, so nonsensical! And one side of my nature tells me she would be right. Yet, oh my heart, my heart! it tells me that I need not have been married at all; but that no pure woman should have been persuaded by any arguments to enter into an engagement, unless she was quite sure she loved the man whom she had promised to marry.

Oh my guelder-rose! I look for you in vain in the bosom of my dress. Perhaps heaven is not real. In the wreckage of faith which is going on all round us, some of us women, as well as men, are ready to catch at any plank to swim by. We are

always apt to lose our faith in heaven when we lower our standard here. That is one of the truisms which, by Rule No. 1, I ought to eschew; but there is something else which is deeper than any truism ;—that only the pure in heart can hope to see God.

Possibly it is because a man has come to the house whose ideal is so high, and who endeavours honestly and truly, every day of his life, to live up to it; while I, for such paltry excuses, have allowed mine to be wrested out of my hand, that I feel so low and disgusted with myself. I wonder if the other people with whom I am to spend my life ever get disgusted too with their constant round of pleasure. It is a little hard that I should be the only one to take myself to task in this fashion. I notice that whenever anybody *does* get out of spirits, the blame is always ascribed to the liver; and a course of waters is always thought necessary, either at Baden-Baden, Spa, Carlsbad, Homburg, or any other pretty or amusing place.

But I am not old enough for that ; I shall have to wait till I am middle-aged.

And yet somehow the vitality seems to have gone out of me ; I have no buoyancy ; no more delight. I try to hide it from my mother ; there are days when I really feel as if she were the younger of the two.

Sometimes I wonder that Lord Melton is so easily satisfied on his side, and that he takes my passive acquiescence for a joyful acceptance of his wealth and possessions ; but my mother says I ought to be supremely thankful, and that it is such a nuisance when men weary their wives with their uxoriousness.

"Freedom on one side," she says, "implies a certain amount of freedom on the other ; we married women have disabilities enough in all conscience, without inflicting fresh burdens on ourselves."

She perfectly sympathises with me when I tell her I do not like Percy to make too much fuss

with me, or to put his arms round me before strangers. "It would make me sick," I explained. "Tell him I must have time to get used to him first."

She smiled at my ignorance. Did I think that such things happened amongst people who were "highly connected"?—how I wish she would not say "highly connected"!—it is that sort of slip which makes me doubt whether she is as well descended as she says—not that it matters at all, but that I hate myself for doubting. But I was certainly relieved when she added: "Leave it all to me; Lord Melton and I understand each other perfectly; I flatter myself that I shall not be one of the hated mothers-in-law,—we get on capitally, and I have always been accustomed to manage these things with men".

What had she not managed? Why, if she had been the Duke of Wellington, I don't believe she would have dawdled till Blucher's men came up, as they say now he did. Short and sharp strokes,

—that is the way with her ; and she may be trusted for winning all her Waterloos.

After all, I need not be frightened ; Percy takes things quite quietly and coolly, and after getting my “promise true” he has troubled me very little. He is perfectly content to leave me to my painting or music during the hours when he amuses himself with the other girls. I sometimes think that it is as mother says—that so long as he has supplied himself with a dignified *châtelaine* to sit at the head of his table in the future, he will be well pleased to have it as it is.

“Well, my dear,” my mother says, “it is quite natural. A man like Melton is not likely to marry the girls with whom he cuts jokes, and who go fishing with him. He likes plenty of fun, and if they accept his hospitality, it is because they like it too ; but you might have known from the first that he would choose quite another woman to be the mother of his children.”

If she had known how her words irritated me

she would not have told me *that*. We are so differently constituted that she sometimes overshoots the mark. I can see quite plainly that Percy has been too long accustomed to live for himself to let a *fiancée*, or a wife, be much of a factor in his life.

He takes it for granted, perhaps from what my mother has told him, that I shall expect nothing more than to be a cypher in his life. And I am terribly inconsistent; for this state of things vexes me. I tell myself that if I really loved him in the old-fashioned sentimental way, I should be tempted to do something to make him jealous.

And yet this system has its advantages: it gives me cosy hours all to myself; it enables me to give as much of my time to painting as I please, and I feel that I need it if I am to make any progress. It would be hackneyed to say that one art is enough for one human life; and that most people feel their eyes grow dim and their hearing becoming less acute just as they are beginning to

excel in one—an argument, perhaps, that there must be another life to go on with what we have feebly commenced, were it not that all Nature is full of irony, and that her irony is sometimes cruel.

I have put my music on one side for the present ; and I am deep, *deep* in painting, knowing that I shall probably never have such a good opportunity again, because, as mother reminds me, when I am married I shall find my hands pretty full with all sorts of other things, like amusements and visiting.

Really, my mother has a wonderful way of getting everything for me that I want. She continually says: “My dear, leave it all to me, and *I* will manage him”. And when she sees that her frequent representation of how I shall have a splendid house and estate, with a husband who adores me, and who has a seat in the House of Lords, and how I shall be able to know anybody and give anything to anybody I choose, insisting whenever I like on my season in London, where I

can go to Court, give splendid dinners, and superb "At homes," becomes like an oft-told fairy tale which palls and cloyes from excess of sweetness,—she knows at once how to alter her tone.

Strange to say, it was she herself who proposed, when she heard that an artist was coming to the house, that I should take lessons. I told her it would be impossible; but she immediately said that she would manage it all for me with Melton; and she was as good as her word,—it seems to me she can turn Melton round her little finger. I wonder if I shall ever have the same skill which she has acquired with men, as she tells me, through the practice of years. Talk of the subjection of women! It is a part of this system which seems to come to my mother by instinct to pride oneself on holding the whip-hand over man, while pretending to go merrily in harness. Melton is nowhere with her. I must confess she is an adept, always knowing the vulnerable points of the masculine armour in which she can plant her

arrows, and displaying much ingenuity in inventing innocent little tortures for those who bluster and threaten cruelty to our sex.

I suspect her of trying to get on the wrong side of Mr. Colville, who not unnaturally objected to giving these lessons, seeing that he had come here for quite another object. But she put it in such a way that it would have been quite impossible for any man who called himself a gentleman to continue to object. And to *me* she said: "You see, my dear, I am doing what I promised, and giving way to you in everything that will make your stay agreeable".

Somehow I was especially reserved with Mr. Colville. I felt that my manner with him was unfortunate, giving the impression that I was stilted, and proud of the match I was going to make. I was very chary of showing him my sketches. I knew they were but poor daubs, and that when people praised them it was because they could not very well do otherwise, since my

mother insisted on exhibiting them. How often had I blushed and wanted to hide them, feeling quite sure that I should be laughed at behind my back ! “ It is dreadful to have to show one’s work to professionals,” I said.

“ But I scarcely deserve to be called a professional,” he answered laughingly. “ It is an ugly word ; it sticks in one’s throat, for it assumes so much : and our pretensions rarely help us.”

“ You know what I mean ; *you* have been trained, and I am so ignorant you will laugh at my things.”

“ No attempt to render Nature, even if it is a failure, should be laughed at,” he said ; “ the great thing is for it to be an honest attempt ; and I feel sure that yours will be that.”

Why are people always stabbing me by making allusions to my honesty ? It did not put me in a good temper, but I showed him the sketches without apologising any more.

“ They are miserable failures,” I muttered to

myself; "all the more disappointing because I meant a good deal."

Now, the curious and unexpected thing was that he saw the meaning *through* the failure.

"Of course, they are amateurish; you need to learn the technique," he said, lingering over them with rather a pleased smile, as if they interested him; "but the colour of those tender green fronds of fern against the russet branches of the oak is true. You are not afraid of truth. Oh, I know what you are going to say: this work is spotty, and that is splashy and smeary, but you will learn to remedy that. The great thing which one dreads in amateurs is conventionality, and most ladies are so bent on turning out pretty things—*that* is so utterly hopeless. Of course," he added, holding my poor attempts up to the light, and looking at them with an indulgent smile, "you fall into the mistake of nearly all amateurs,—of trying to see too much at one time; but you will learn to correct that."

And I, who had been feeling as if it would be better to give it all up because I could never be anything but a dabbler,—and I despise dabblers,—still said nothing, though I felt it was awfully kind and encouraging of him, and I could go to my drawing with a good heart.

For I had determined not to be drawn into conversation with this man.

“You are thinking that it is better to do one thing well than to attempt too many, and you are fearing you will never have time to perfect your work,” he said. “Well, that was terribly true at one time, when people expected their governesses, for instance, to teach four or five languages, and to be perfect in all the branches of music, painting, and deportment as they called it. But now there is so much talk about specialising, that the fear may be whether women will fail in the opposite direction, and collapse into learning nothing about art unless they can be—what was it you called it?—professionals.”

So he was a thought-reader; he could not only read my thoughts, but quiz them. I was more certain than ever that our drawing lessons should be quiet ones.

CHAPTER VII.

ALTHEA'S JOURNAL CONTINUED.

25th March. Melton Hall.—A good deal has happened since I wrote last.

I have neglected my journal because I have been working so desperately hard at my painting. Mother frets herself because I work so hard ; she says I am injuring my good looks. Certainly when I look in the glass I can see a little fold coming between my eyebrows, as if I had been trying to be like a young eaglet learning to stare at the sun, when, after all, I am only a poor kitten whose eyes need continual bathing before they should attempt to peer into the problems of this complicated universe.

I have been going through the wear and tear of trying to mediate between the two personalities,

pulling two different ways, which I discern in myself; and I ask you, my journal, if that is not enough to drive any girl mad.

It is all the worse since Mr. Colville has been here. I sometimes wish he had not come; for instead of helping me to lay my ghosts, his very existence amongst us calls them up again.

It is amusing to hear my mother, with her predilection for managing every one, trying to take him into confidence, and to get him on her side.

"I am not happy about my daughter. Too close attention to the painting is telling upon her. She is so sadly enthusiastic,—always like that. She is beginning to lose her good looks. Really, Mr. Colville, you ought not to allow it."

Any other man in the house would have considered it his duty to respond to my mother's lead and answer that it would be impossible for Miss Le Geyt to lose her beauty. Have I become so accustomed to these empty compliments that the artist's silence seemed almost strange to me?

There are times when a woman learns to hate her beauty, and I think I sometimes hate it when little accidents like this make me feel so foolish.

I am afraid that Mr. Colville scarcely took any notice of my mother's appeal. He is not a man of many words, and seems to be on his guard in this house, or he would have told her, as he told me, that he sees a great law of labour outlined for the future, in which many inequalities will disappear, and that women should learn to exert themselves as well as men. I am not an enthusiast ; but, if I am not mistaken, *he* is one, and will probably have to suffer much more in the future than he has suffered already.

There was a peculiar smile on his face when my mother continued : " It really is too unreasonable for Miss Le Geyt to turn a pleasure into a fatigue. It is not as if she is like one of those poor girls who will have to get their living by working at painting ; and Lord Melton will be as vexed as I am if she makes herself pale and thin."

Never had I found it more difficult to keep from speaking out. As it was, I fear that a flash of intelligence passed from my eyes to my drawing-master's; and though he has taken no notice of it, but met me at the next lesson exactly as if nothing had happened, I feel it unfortunate that he should be able to guess that I am proud and resent these speeches as indignities.

I must not break Rule No. 2. But though I bit my lips and kept silent, because I had determined that that man should never read my thoughts, I fear I took it out in my painting. For, after all, how little mother knows! It is not the work which is injuring my health, but this continual internal conflict, which has been going on worse than ever since Mr. Colville came.

At times it makes me almost hate him, for he puts us all to shame.

I had agreed with my mother when she said that she did not believe in people giving up all their worldly goods, unless they did it to get a reputation

for themselves, or because they wished to enter monasteries or nunneries, or were crazed outright ; and now I feel that it is a disconcerting thing to find some reality which gives a shock to your preconceived theory.

That Norman Colville should have sacrificed everything he possessed, and be so cheerful about it, never seeming to be aware that he has done anything in the least heroic ; that he should put himself in a position to be snubbed, and yet that it should be so impossible for any one to snub him ; is something so difficult to fit into my previous experiences that I can only give it up, as a riddle which my poor little brains will not solve. All my mother's hypotheses are at fault.

He is not mad ; he seems to have a passion for living amongst his fellow-creatures and helping humanity, therefore he will never think of entering a monastery ; neither is it his first object to save his own soul, like some people who leave all their money to charities on their deathbeds. No ; I have

given up puzzling about the problem. I think the best way is for me to leave all problems of the kind alone, and to get them out of my head by work, *work*.

I rise pretty early in the morning and sit down to my work, so as to seize every spare minute. Sometimes I have to force myself to it in the beginning. The ugly idea *will* intrude that Percy can buy me all the pictures I shall want, and that it is of no use messing good paper. Sometimes I have to force myself to what is nauseous.

And then after a time I have my reward. A sensation of peace and rest steals over me,—a beneficent, soothing mental sedative.

And then I no longer wonder that women in all ages liked work, whether it was the tapestry of the Middle Ages which the poor creatures had to stitch in at the back of the canvas, not even seeing the pattern; or the hateful Berlin wool work with hideous patterns, or the crochet antimacassars catching in people's hair and spoiling their tempers.

All tended to the same purpose, to keep women soothed, and not to allow them too much time to think. Well, I must not break Rule No. 3.

26th March.—There is a quiet content about Percy's friend, quite superior to our easily disturbed nerves. Sometimes I cannot believe that he is so intimate with Percy as my *fiancé* would make out. They might have been great friends in boyhood, but *now* I am sure there is very little in common between them. But Norman Colville is so loyal that he would never allow himself to say anything in disparagement of others.

Percy is perfectly safe with him. Mr. Colville is not even ambitious; I could not have believed that so selfless a man existed.

Do not fancy from this that I tell him anything about my affairs. I was so alarmed when I first discovered that he had a faculty of intuition, that ever since then I have made a rule of wrapping myself in a sort of chain armour, like that which the cavaliers were said to wear in times of danger

beneath their fine clothes. I have been guilty of stratagem in my absurd attempts to hide my real self from him. For it is absurd. What am I to him but one more frivolous, self-seeking girl? Under any circumstances is it likely I could have been anything more to him? Even if I had chanced to meet him before — Silence, silence, even to my journal!

Some thoughts are not meant to be put down on paper, but the question is whether such thoughts should not be stifled altogether.

My answer is—yes.

27th March.—Yes, I have been untruthful. I have pretended when he talked about the suffering classes and the state of so many men for whom it is difficult to get work, that these questions did not interest me in the least. And, for once, I succeeded in deceiving him.

I could see from the expression of his face that he thought it was a pity the future wife of so large a landowner should be so unfeeling.

"You believe in humanity, and I do not—that is the difference between us," I retorted when he tried to plead his cause.

"I believe," he said, "in the social conscience which is growing all over England; yours will be awakened like the rest."

"I do not understand," I answered, "why you should plead on the side of all this unhealthy casuistry. I know your story, but I think you have been over-sensitive about other people's troubles. There are weak moments when I too have an instinct of shame about some of these things; but I might as well try to cure them as take Mrs. Partington's broom and try to sweep up the Atlantic. 'What can't be cured must be endured.' If I were a man I would rise above this sensitive-ness."

"It is not I only who am sensitive, as you please to call it; others are sensitive. I do not take any special credit to myself nor any shame for weakness," he answered, as he corrected some faults in

my amateur drawing, being perhaps a little sharper on them than usual.

For I tried to copy my mother, and to put on an amused smile, which I dare say rather irritated him. I even attempted to keep it up, remembering how she would have told me that, in a case like this, it would be necessary to exert my proper dignity. And then I knew there was a change in me,—one of those changes which always rather annoy me, since mother says they are a part of my attraction, and drew Percy to me when so many other girls were trying in vain to fascinate him.

“It is the unexpectedness,” she said, to my great mortification, “which pleases people. So long as the world lasts I suppose men will be always like the *blasé* Athenians, continually on the look-out for something new.”

How I hated that way of talking, and yet I could not help those changes which came naturally to me !

I dare say Mr. Colville was a good deal surprised

when I said in a softened voice : “ I suppose you think me unfeeling ”.

After all, it was stupid of me not to have been warned by mother’s remark, for I saw the corresponding change in his face when he answered hesitatingly :—

“ I quite understand. It is the way in which you have been brought up, because you have never been in contact with these things as I have. You take up a newspaper and read of some terrible accident in America, or an explosion in a coal pit, costing the lives of a number of men. In the former case you remark : ‘ How risky the Americans are ! How foolish to overheat their carriages so as to risk those fires ! ’ In the latter you sigh and say the pitmen are careless, they have been warned again and again. In neither case does the catastrophe come home to you and stir your sympathies ; and it is of no use to make an effort to educate yourself into sensitiveness as to the fates which may befall great masses of your fellow-men perfectly unknown

to yourself. All such things must be spontaneous."

"If you live among such a lot of people in trouble, what are you to do? You can't expect to alleviate all that distress, and you end by doing something Utopian, in which you not only sacrifice yourself, but somebody else who cares for you," was my next unexpected speech.

Too late I remembered again that it might have seemed bold of me to refer, even in my capacity as a budding matron, and even by the remotest hint, to a romantic story which had got about, as to the unhappiness of a high-born damsel, whom Mr. Colville had sacrificed as well as himself to his whim. But I was vexed about the gossip, and not sorry to find that it had no foundation, and that he was determined to nip all such foolish talk in the bud, when he answered, a little abruptly: "There was no one to sacrifice. I prefer to have no family ties; they might interfere seriously with my purpose in life."

I am really rather glad I blundered in that way, though I did not intend it. It will make it so much easier for me to have free conversation with him in future.

I wonder if he quite meant it, when he added slowly: "The artist who marries is always a fool. He should be like Michael Angelo, wedded to his art."

I have kept up the character assigned to me by fate. I have answered proudly and indifferently; I have even made imputations. My mother would hardly have exacted so much from me. And yet I feel that it is hard.

My own youth and my individuality ought not to be sacrificed.

Percy is contented; he takes it for granted that I shall expect nothing more from him. He leaves me free, and amuses himself with the other women. This feeling of possession on his part irritates me more than I can explain. But, of course, he is right. According to my mother, my position should inspire me with feelings of intense gratitude

towards him. No, no; I cannot go so far as that; but I shall be loyal, and my loyalty prevents me from becoming too sympathetic, when Mr. Colville talks to me on the subjects on which he is interested. Some instinct which I cannot define tells me that it would be dangerous for us to grow too intimate, and that he is purposely a little hard in his way of speaking to me.

28th March.—Good heavens! I have been looking over my journal, and find that I am growing so terribly serious that I ought to be one of those good women struggling for their daily bread!

Then if I were taken to a doctor, it would be the old story of jaded nerves, and rest would be prescribed; and I should go away with a sickly smile, knowing that I could not afford rest.

But *I*? Is not mother right? Why should I spoil such looks as I have? I don't much care about them myself, but other people seem to care. Why should I make my face stern, lean, and anxious?

I don't want life to grow so desperately real, or

my feelings so deep, when I shall have always to live in the shallows. It is a bad trick, and a morbid one. I mean to accept my limitations and be happy.

Let us consider this as settled. I don't mean to take life too seriously ; I give you notice that I shall do nothing of the kind. The day is a lovely one. Percy has planned a fishing party, and says, in his usual obliging way, that I may do as I like about joining it or not. Now, as I don't like to see the fishes gasping for air, or having to be knocked on the head,—a foolish little prejudice of mine,—I think I shall take Landseer and go for a long ramble on the moors. Landseer is the deerhound ; we have called him by that name because he is grandson of the dog which the great artist actually painted. And he is a beauty, quite as lovely as his grandsire.

He knows what I am saying as I look at him with pleading eyes ; and I tell him in return that I could not have a more delightful companion, and

that I would rather have a trudge with him than with any man I know.

29th March.—We had a delightful ramble. Landseer went gamboling on before me up the grass-grown road, once the roughest of cart tracks, which winds up the hilly moor. Few folks attack this road,—certainly none of the people staying at Melton would venture near it, for it needs the thickest of thick boots; and even then if you venture out of the path, there is danger of sinking in the moss, soft and tempting to the eye, but leading down to a swampy hollow, where a deceitful stream murmurs amidst alder bushes and willow trees. Just now one can see it, adorned by the cuckoo flower and budding marsh marigold on its soft green banks; but in summer-time, when the leaves are thick, you could hardly know of its existence. Landseer and I know of all the dangers as well as the beauties; so we keep to the heights where a spur of dark firs sloping down the hill was the first of many such belts of woodland. How invigorating it was, with

the fresh air from the uplands blowing all dismal thoughts away! I did not know which to admire most—the jungle of oaks and birches, or the gorse which was all aflame with blossom. By-and-by the thick veil of leaves would hide the shy creatures of fur and feather from the prying eye of man. Now I had to be on my guard lest Landseer should startle a pheasant, or hurry off in pursuit of an innocent rabbit. It was funny to see his excitement when he knew, by the sound of claws rattling up the bark of a pine tree, that a bright-eyed squirrel had escaped whither he could not follow; and funnier still to see the little thing wagging its bushy tail defiantly, and looking down at us from the fork of a branch, quite thirty feet above my head.

But it was not half so funny to flush a pheasant and to hear the whir of its wings, or to see a tiny ball of white and grey fur, which I guessed to be a baby rabbit, scudding away for its very life.

No; my companion, though an intelligent one, needed all my watchfulness. I had to be so con-

stantly calling to him and keeping my eyes on him that I could not give my attention to the sweet sunshine lighting up the old grey walls, or shining upon the scattered farms and homesteads and distant orchards, all soon to be in bridal array.

And therefore it was not much wonder that I nearly stumbled against Mr. Colville. After all, he had as much right to enjoy the moor as I had. It was quite unreasonable, when I came to think of it, for any one to expect an artist to stay at home when Nature was providing such a rich feast of beauty.

But we both looked rather foolish and disconcerted when we nearly knocked against each other at the sharp turn of the road.

"You!" we each cried simultaneously; and then both of us laughed, feeling the awkwardness of the exclamation.

In all our sketching expeditions we had either had chaperons, such as kind Mrs. Armitage, or one of the other numerous ladies. Mother had offered

more than once ; but as she speedily got bored and generally liked to join the driving or fishing parties, we had compassion on her juvenility. Indeed, it was true, as she sometimes remarked, that she had already immolated herself enough for her child ; and now that the child's fortune was made there seemed to be no further need for immolation.

Mr. Colville was the first to break the silence, to point out, in his capacity of teacher, the exquisite shades and gradations of tint on the broad moor and stretches of meadowland and the patches of wood and primitive forest that still lingered and fringed the side of the hills.

"Soon," he said, "it would be covered with waves of foliage;" and he added that the contrast between the feathery birch and the deep foliaged oaks was one which always delighted him. "You are nearly as well off as if you were in the Highlands here," he remarked, still keeping to his *rôle* as drawing-master. "Size does not make much difference when you come to sketching."

I answered by commenting on the delicious freshness of the greens, and on the soft earth bright with young blades of grass and springing fronds of fern, fresh and cool as if watered by subterranean streams.

“Ah! that is well; it shows that your eye for colour is being developed by practice; it is the advantage of dear old England that the springs are generally so green and the pastures rarely athirst.” After that he began to talk about the grey greens of Italy, the olives, the cypresses and the ilexes; and how even an enthusiast for Italy like Browning felt that he could exchange the olive trees for a straggling hedgerow of flowering hawthorn in spring time.

From that we got to Browning; indeed, I may say the Brownings, whom both of us loved; and I found that Percy's friend was an optimist, a healthily real young Englishman, without morbid ideas, and that all the vapours and miseries from which I had suffered during the last few weeks seemed to blow

away in his presence as in the breezes of that hill.

Ah, how magically beautiful everything seemed to be as we returned home talking and laughing whilst we admired the distant view chequered by the hedges of innumerable fields, and went into raptures about the beautiful sunshine of early spring, a light such as is rarely seen "on land or sky".

The walk has done me no end of good. I felt dismal when I went out; and now "my bosom's lord sits lightly on his throne," I quoted to my mother, as I ran up to dress for dinner.

She, too, had been delighted with her expedition; and it dawned on me, not quite for the first time, that she also might have thoughts of changing her name. There was that old captain, whom I could not bear, who constantly dogged her in these excursions.

But she looked at me rather more keenly than usual as she said: "*Some* mothers would say it

was not right for you to go out in this way alone ; but I know that that is an old-fashioned theory about chaperons, and that *fin de siècle* girls are wretched when they are fettered in that way ”.

I winced at that expression, “*fin de siècle*”. It was not only hackneyed, but, in the way my mother used it, it seemed to mean something fast and horrid. I did not allow myself to tell her this ; it would not have been dutiful. But the thought was there, and could not be got rid of. It spoilt the pleasure of my walk.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALTHEA'S JOURNAL CONTINUED.

31st March. Melton Hall.—We have had a wonderful change in the weather during the last two days after the unnatural heat—one of those changes which show the treachery of the climate we were so ready to praise. There has been one of those spells of cold which would have cut off the redundant blossom of the apple and pear trees, had the buds been a little more set. As it is, it may augur badly for the fruit in the autumn; but the guests who are fond of riding seem to be rather pleased than otherwise. It was thought that the hunting was quite over for the season; but this will furnish one more opportunity for the hounds to meet.

Though I do not exactly hunt myself, I always rather enjoy a meet. It is a very pretty sight.

Mother will drive in a basket carriage ; and, I am sorry to say, it has been decided that the captain is to drive her ; so *she* is sure to enjoy herself, though,—how I wish I could only tell her !—I do not trust that captain.

The girls here make fun of him ; and I do not wonder. He spins such yarns, and we are quite sure that they are not half of them true. He *will* pretend to understand literature, though he is awfully ill-read ; and you can scarcely mention anybody celebrated or important whom he does not say he has met. The other day, I overheard somebody asking him if he had ever met Darwin ; and, of course, it turned out that years before he had met Darwin, and had been on rather intimate terms with him.

“Yes, he examined into a good deal,” I heard him explaining confidentially and patronisingly ; “he was careful about his facts, and he wrote pretty good English, rather in the style of Macaulay.”

I could not help adding wickedly that some one

had told me Darwin had been well aware his English was not up to the mark ; I did not add that it was his humility.

And then it was too bad of us ! We began to quiz him about other things. “ Did he like Shakespeare ? ” “ Well,” he said, “ you see Shakespeare was terribly overrated ; not equal to Byron, you know,—*there* was a poet ! Shakespeare wrote neither prose nor poetry ; ” and then, with a critical air—“ I don’t like his rhythmical metre.”

I caught mother’s eye, and tried not to explode.

Ah ! I have broken one of my rules, and made another digression. But I am bothered about the captain. I am afraid he does not really care much about mother for her own sake. I am pretty sure that he is on the lookout for some ultimate advantage ; and that, when he finds out she is poor — However, it is no use for me to speculate about that !—perhaps she knows that Percy will give her handsome presents, or make her an allowance in the future. Percy, of course, takes a prominent

part in the hunt. And I—well, I make a cowardly compromise. I daren't tell him that I am much more frightened of seeing the poor, wretched, panting fox, and of possibly being in at the death, than of hurting myself. But I pretend that I am nervous, so I follow afar off.

Well, the difficulty was about Mr. Colville. Percy did not want him to be left out, why, I don't exactly know, but I fancy betting is going on in the smoking-room about how far they can get the recluse out of his shell ; and that is a thing which I resent. At any rate, when Percy asked his so-called friend, the latter as usual made an excuse. "It is so long," he said, "since I have been accustomed to ride to hounds, I might injure your beast if I accepted your offer."

And Percy, who has confided in me, and told me that in his own heart he is really weary of the "pink,"—everything being too much trouble to him and excessive riding an exertion,—was ready enough to accept his excuse, till (noticing an

expression of incredulity in my eyes), he said laughingly :—

“There is an ironical twinkle in your pupil’s mischievous eyes which says that she is sure your seat is not so bad. Now, as she generally lags behind, I should suggest that for once you reverse your parts. If it is true that you have forgotten your riding, let her instruct you.”

This sally was received with a burst of laughter, a laughter that increased when it was proposed that mother was to follow behind in her basket carriage to see that neither of us came to grief.

“*Chi va piano, va sano*,” quoted one of the ladies, loud enough to be heard ; and I noticed that Mr. Colville coloured a little and kept his eyes on his plate. This lady was a new arrival, who somehow was acquainted with Percy’s friend. She pretends to know a good deal about his antecedents, and was always making insinuations which I heard of again through my mother. *He* must have heard of these mysterious hints, but it was characteristic

of him that he never took any trouble to deny them.

"Yes, it is true," he said, in answer to my inquiries, "that I met Miss Caterlot, and saw a good deal of her in London. Had Lord Melton told me that she was coming, it might have been better taste for me to have remained in Rome."

Beyond these few words he has vouchsafed no explanation, and does not seem to care when she calls him names like Socialist, Anarchist, and Nihilist,—names which frighten my mother out of her wits.

"The truth is, she knows very little about it, and I don't pretend to know much more myself. I am not an Œdipus to undertake to solve the riddle of the Sphinx ; and the more I have to do with these labour questions the more I find them immensely difficult," he said to me, with rather a sad smile, when he was correcting one of my sketches ; "but I certainly am neither Anarchist nor Nihilist."

I do not like Irene Caterlot. She is very handsome,

but pretends to be much younger than she is, and gets herself up a good deal. It is very well done, but other girls resent it; and I could not help being amused when my mother observed that it was unfair to *her*, and that pencilling beneath the eyes threw them out so wonderfully that if I did not take care she would quite eclipse *me*.

“I only wish she would not say nasty interfering things,” I answered, “and put new plans into Percy’s head.”

For I suspected her of manœuvring, and I never feel quite safe when people are double in their ways. Much later I suspected him of knowing that she was the lady whom Norman Colville was said to have jilted.

Why did Percy fall into the snare? I could not help being riled, though I was vexed with myself. For ever since our meeting on the moor, when we had found out that we had so many thoughts in common, there had been a kind of freemasonry established between myself and my drawing-master,

which might have been nothing to *him*, but which, alas, threatened to disturb my peace!

I was always asking myself why I had not met him earlier in my life; why if I was destined to meet him at all, I had not done so when I was free, only a short time before.

Something warned me that the sooner he went back to Rome the better for my peace of mind. And it seemed cruelty to force him on me like this. Did no one guess that I was only human, or was Irene Caterlot the only other woman to divine it when she fixed her wonderful eyes on mine, as if she would read the innermost secrets of my soul?

And Percy? When I was using all my efforts, and needed all my courage to keep as much as possible out of this man's way, did it not seem hard that it should be Percy himself who should insist on throwing us so much together?

6th April.—How foolish I am! How could I make a trouble of what Mr. Colville himself did not notice or care for?

Of course he rode perfectly well. Otherwise I should have suspected Irene of wishing him to have a spill. For somehow I think it must have been by her suggestion that a mare was selected for him which was one of the most difficult to manage of all the animals in the stable. There were certain places on the road where she had the habit of prancing and curveting. But it proved as I expected. Directly she began to rear and plunge, the rider, who had spoken of his own riding as almost beneath contempt, knew how to soothe her, holding her in by the bridle, and gently touching her rather than hitting her, as if to remind her of the existence of the whip.

The mare was soon quieted. Then some one serenely remarked that she was a "game little animal," and that if Colville had never ridden anything in his life most likely he would have "come a cropper".

And then we both laughed, and the huntsmen who were near us laughed too—it being the fashion,

I never could quite tell why, always to laugh at things which were dangerous.

He did not seem half so much pleased with my horse. He remarked that it looked like a clever hunter, but was much too large for me, and that it was as if the saddles had been put on the wrong beasts. "It is capable of carrying double your weight," he said; "and pardon me, if I venture to observe that I don't think it exactly safe."

"It is my own choice," I declared.

We fell behind, as I always did, urging, what was true, that I was not strong enough to follow the hounds at a great pace.

But perhaps I could have prevented lagging behind that day. My conscience tells me it would have been better to have hurried on than to have yielded to the fascination of a personality which had begun to dominate me. I exonerate my companion from the slightest intention of exercising such an influence—it was as if something magnetic

began to sway me ; but I am sure he was not aware of it.

I do not shut my eyes to my own fault. I see clearly that now when the barriers between our intercourse were broken down—now that we had discovered we had a mutual hatred of the dull and commonplace—the idle and conventional—I ought to have been more on my guard. The very fact that we took up our conversations where we left them off last—having a recollection of what we had said last time to each other—ought to have warned us that there was an unusual sympathy between us.

Ah, well, it was one of the days to be remembered in a lifetime ! As we rode on, and were each of us thrilled with the beauty of the landscape—the gentle acclivities on either side, and the rich meadowland like an undulating carpet of green and brown velvet—I could understand for the first time how this hunting was the one thing that Irene Caterlot thoroughly enjoyed : the exhilarating feeling in the air—the cry of the hounds—the crisp

grass, and crackling branches—the lovely hollows where the oaktrees kept their brown leaves till they were pushed off by the coming buds—and the delight of going as if on wings !

I ought to have been more watchful. My friend amongst the governesses, Miss Maitland, who recommended me to keep this diary, once said to me : “ You, who seem to be so reserved and self-contained, but are in reality impulsive and romantic, will have to be on your guard against excitement. All things are dangerous when they cause the heart suddenly to expand.”

Dear old thing ! it sounded so like a copy-book axiom ! And there was no one to remind me when I, who prided myself on the reading which I tried to keep up ; I, who divided people into two classes, the cultured and the uncultured ; the gulf which divided the educated from the uneducated being in my foolish estimation almost as wide as that which separated human beings from other animals ; was inclined to chatter more than

was wise, because I had a sympathetic companion, just when I should have been self-contained.

Least of all was it wise for me to talk about Irene Caterlot and the other women on whom, in my absurd conceit, I had been inclined to sit in judgment.

Can I help it? Can I subdue this tendency to criticism, which may be unkind? By-and-by, when I am married to Lord Melton, will these lightning flashes come to me and reveal the real man,—shallow and heartless? Does he even love me, or is he only in love with himself? Well, when I remember that from his earliest years he has been accustomed to libations poured out in his honour, it is a wonder that he is not more spoilt; and it is conceivable that he is vexed with me, because I have not flattered him enough: I have left all that to mother, remembering that I shall have enough of it in the future, unless I leave it then to people like Irene Caterlot.

But is it to be on and on like this—always like

this—even to our golden wedding day? Fancy, if it were to go on for fifty years ! It will never be a case of entreating for mutual confidences ; he has never had a confidence to give me. Perhaps he gives them to Irene, who has so many compliments on her honeyed lips?

Was it because I was jealous of Irene that I suffered myself to question Mr. Colville about her? If I prided myself on my faculty of observation, I had never before so failed in my discretion.

I knew that I had no right to discuss Percy's guests, or to abuse my position in the house as if it were a vantage ground for critical observation.

But, fortunately, Mr. Colville eluded all my questions. He would discourse on the general, but never on the particular ; and I soon found that I knew just as much about Miss Caterlot as I had done before.

He defended her love of hunting by saying that she did nearly everything well, riding included, and that he did not at all wonder that women found

hunting a relief from the tame, pussy-cat existence in the velvet-paved civilisation to which they were so often condemned. As to the cruelty in the sport, he admitted that that was a drawback ; but reminded me that Nature herself was "red in tooth and nail," and that the animals did not stand on ceremony in their dealings with their neighbours.

If I was angry before I was more angry now. I did not associate Miss Caterlot with any sort of gossip ; but I began to think that she had fascinated Mr. Colville, as she had fascinated Percy.

I forgot that I had never heard this man say an unkind word of any one, and protested to myself that whatever *he* might think, *I* had no idea of girls who could drink their champagne and *liqueur* with such masculine gusto, and who smoked cigarettes and cut jokes amongst themselves of which they would have been ashamed had the men been present.

I said angrily, before I could control myself :—

"I don't like a great deal that goes on in our

society, but it is useless for me to object to it ; I can do no good ”.

He did not answer in words ; most likely he did not intend to answer at all, so careful is he always to keep his visor lowered. But I was aware of one of those rapid exchanges of intelligence which can scarcely be defined, and knew that it was quite my fault, not his, that it had taken place.

In spite of this, I, who had generally been so careful to dot my *i*'s, went on wildly and passionately :—

“ They say that this is to be the age of progress for women, that our mothers only placed their trembling feet on the first rung of the ladder, and we are climbing on and on to nobler heights. Heaven forbid, if it is to be like the emancipation that is going on in this house ! Don't you see that they are bored to death with each other's society—bored about everything, and that I am bored too ? ”

I don't think I am a flirt ; I always despised the tricks of the trade when mother tried, as some of

the girls here would say, to coach me up in them.

In the days when she wanted me to make a good match she used to tell me that my eyelashes were long and black, and that the eyes they veiled were large and rich in colour like the eyes which were called ox-like by an old poet, named Homer. Of course, I knew that this was flattery. And when she added that the management of the eyes was a very ancient science which had been too long disregarded, like the graceful management of the fan when women had their *salons* and wielded their fans like sceptres, and that the play of the eyes had been well understood by the Helens and Cleopatras of the past, I determined never to raise and lower my eyelids in the way which she advised.

What devil prompted me now suddenly to uplift them with a look appealing for sympathy and with all the expression it was possible for me to put into them? Perhaps I was enthusiastic and

forgot, but my enthusiasm needed to be subdued. Perhaps it was the comfort of complaining to some one ; I have known since that there is no temptation so subtle to girls as that of venting a grievance. At any rate I soon found I was launching into a digression about the unsatisfactoriness of fashionable life, not only here but everywhere.

“London is worse than anything,” I found myself saying, “and I shall have to pass a great part of my life in London during the season. Every time I come home with my antipathy increased—no doubt it is an utterly irrational antipathy—but I was not born for amusing myself; and the amusement of those London seasons palls on me so very soon.”

I scarcely knew what I was saying in this fit of sudden expansion followed by the contraction of my heart, haunted as I was by spiritual presentiments of evil from unknown and unexplored quarters which seemed to be driving me on. The slaying of my ideal, which had done so much

harm to my own nature that there seemed no longer any ideal to aim at, was impelling me to chant this ridiculous Jeremiad, and acknowledge my unhappiness to the last man on earth to whom I should have acknowledged it.

For somehow I was letting him know that I was like himself, and could never be guilty of the hundred and one little meannesses perpetrated every day by so many practised adepts of the social craft, and that the men who were without fortune were a thousand times more admirable to me than those who had been spoilt by inheriting it.

Looking back, I can exonerate myself from having said so in as many words; but that I had suddenly turned enchantress, and that he was as suddenly falling under the spell of my unconscious appeal for sympathy, I saw at once with shame, and remembered myself in time.

I felt that I had been wickedly foolish, and rode faster with the hope of remedying my mistake. The trot, trot of the horse's hoofs got on my nerves. I

even went to the opposite extent of raging inwardly at my own weakness, and losing my presence of mind in an emergency.

For we were soon confronted by a sunk fence, a fence which I ought to have known would have stopped all but the boldest riders in the field. I had so often been congratulated on my fine appearance in the saddle, and the readiness with which I managed my beast, that, forgetful of the warning given to me that very day about the unwieldiness and size of my horse, I put him straight at the obstacle.

I cannot even now tell exactly what happened, whether it was the fault of my handling or not, but he jumped short, and both of us fell ; a part of my habit and one of my feet beneath him.

Nothing could have been more provoking, but I knew that I was in considerable danger, as well as in a good deal of pain, and I was quite unable to move. The horse was making frantic efforts to get up, and, if it had not been for Mr. Colville, I must have been dragged.

He followed me as lightly as possible, spurring the flanks of his little mare, which he told me afterwards needed considerable urging directly she caught sight of our catastrophe.

“It was all my fault for letting my animal take the fence first,” I said penitently. “I thought it was only a little jump, and I fancied that the horse would have been able to take the drop quietly.”

Looking back at the gap, it seemed no wonder that my horse had come down on its knees—the only wonder was that I had escaped being kicked as well as dragged, when he so successfully cleared the difficulty, and extricated me.

“It is *you* who are the accomplished horseman,” I tried to say laughingly; “it is too ridiculous to remember that I was appointed to be your teacher.” And then I added, in common gratitude: “I owe my life to you”.

Was it with special intention that he answered gravely: “I am very glad to have been of use, but you must not magnify the slight service I have

rendered you ; I would have done the same for any one ”.

Yes ; I knew it. Was it because I fancied a slight rebuke in an answer which was more stilted than usual, that I felt the cold perspiration coming out in beads on my forehead ? At the same moment there was a twinge of agony as if my ankle had been broken, but it proved to be only a slight sprain ; it was bruised as well, and the bruises turned me so faint as to prevent me from knowing whether it was my imagination that led me to suppose there was emphasis in his speech.

I could never be quite sure ; I could only be thankful that I had the courage to throw myself down again on the grass. If I were to faint, I would not faint in his arms, at least,—if the worst were to come it should not come to *that*.

“ It is quite impossible for you to walk like this,” he was saying when I came to myself. “ I have given orders to some men who ran to our assistance, to fetch a chair from the nearest cottage and carry

you to Melton Hall ; the men will be delighted. Sprains are sometimes worse than broken bones, and Melton will feel as if it is all my bungling, if you are not taken proper care of."

It was with difficulty that I could persuade him to give way to my own conviction that such a procession was really unnecessary, and that it would frighten my mother. It was only when I showed him how easily I could remount my horse, adding that I must beg him not to say much about the accident, that he consented to our riding home more sadly than we had set out, I, for my part, shivering in the dead greyness of the atmosphere now that the sunshine had gone.

It was in deference to my wish that we went in by the back way, so that no one should see the samples of the soil on the horse's knees.

I fancied that he was not pleased at this idea of our having a secret between us. He had saved my life, and I had told the story to no one. I only said that I had sprained my foot, which I might

easily have done in taking one of the fences. But after this I made an excuse about riding with him, so as to avoid the possibility of being left alone in his company in that way any more.

It was a pretence without meaning; for we were often alone—either with Mrs. Armitage, who made her chaperonage an excuse for taking a siesta, or somebody else who had seldom the patience to wait during the sketching lessons. And I do not think Percy liked to make a fuss about it. He thought it prudish, or fancied that it reflected on the perfect freedom he allowed to himself. For he said: “You must allow me to be a judge of these matters of etiquette: your mother does not object—you women have always your little cut and dry maxims amongst yourselves; but I must say that she is singularly exempt from them”.

Whether my dear mother with her admirable generalship guessed more than she let me know, I can never be quite sure. All that she said was: “This young man will not be here long, and I

have every reason to be satisfied with your discretion. Remember that one of the first things you have to learn in social intercourse is never to make much of small things. I must beg you to adhere to this rule, and never to make an ado about nothings."

Ah! her policy was always clever; for had she spoken against Mr. Colville, or alluded to his inferior social status, she would have roused me to defend him, and I might have told her that I was unhappy! I know now that she wished to keep me from speaking out.

CHAPTER IX.

ALTHEA'S JOURNAL CONTINUED.

20th April. Melton Hall.—I don't mean to be reduced to the depths of despondency, just because I made a little mistake the other day. The return journey in life is almost always sadder than the setting out ; and I mean, as I said, to enjoy myself in the beginning. And yet I feel poorly, and have to make as little as possible of the fact that my foot is swollen and in pain.

“Too much thought,” as I said to Mr. Colville, “is a bad thing ;” and he answered that it depended on the kind of thought.

These demons of doubt always destroy our lives. *He* thinks he is allying himself with the forces which make for good ; but to know good from evil is surely the difficulty of life.

The problem is so complicated. Why, for instance, should I not do good by following the wishes of my mother and undertaking a post of influence and responsibility, even though I begin to fear that I care for another man, though he may not care for me? Is all that nonsense about loving and not loving really exploded? as mother says it is. She called Plato an old sentimental humbug when some one told her he talked, what people would now call "rot," about one half of the soul seeking for the other. Then the sooner I give up all that stuff about marrying the being destined for me the better, and reconcile myself to my other duty. We imagine that we have freedom—is it really so? Is not our fate planned for us by inevitable circumstances?

Strengthening myself with all these arguments, I was wheeled in an invalid chair to the room where I take my painting lessons, though I took them with manifest reluctance, wondering if other people would notice my drooping attitude, and scolding myself for having a half-guilty air.

When my friend—for there was no denying that at least we had become friends—tried to take up the former conversation where we had before left it off, I answered languidly as if his fine abstractions had nothing to do with me.

It was nothing to me that I hurt his feelings—did I not hurt myself more?

I was in a bad mood that morning. The river was no longer beautiful, the pretty clouds no longer bewitching. Everything seemed to be blotted out by the dissolving views of my own imagination. I knew that this was wicked as well as foolish. Why should the thoughts within us have power to change the scent of flowers, and make the air feel unhealthy? I shivered, and yet the day was fine. The angry impulses which were stirring my blood, and shaping themselves into defiant and almost maddened speech, made me indignant and unfair when Mr. Colville, talking as he sometimes did in the intervals of our painting lesson, on subjects which might be supposed to be indifferent, tried to interest

me in the story of a poor woman at that time suffering in the London Hospital. He wanted to get up a subscription for her, that she might continue to have some of the little comforts ordered for her by the doctors when she came out and felt the sudden change ; and he thought I might interest my *fiancé* in the case.

Whether or not it was the mention of Lord Melton's name from his lips which irritated me foolishly, in a way which I could not explain to myself, I cannot even now be sure. But I said something cold and unsympathetic, speaking impatiently and almost recklessly. " I dare say it is sad, but Percy cannot bear me to be interfering. To let my mind dwell upon such things will only make me miserable, he says. I suppose the best way to get through one's life is not to trouble too much. Let London look after London ; it is not *our* business. When one is not sure of anything in this world, one fears to be always meddling. So often when we mean to do good, we only do harm."

He looked at me as if he was surprised to hear these platitudes drop so glibly from my lips, and if somehow he had expected me to answer differently. I wondered if he thought I was looking to my future lord, whose opinions were to be a sort of sheet-anchor to me ; who preached philanthropy when others preached it, but whose comfortable maxim was patience and non-interference.

To be hopelessly self-centred, turning round on one's own pivot, and ignoring the unpleasant,—could anything be more contemptible?

But I had committed myself, and felt bound to rattle on.

“We need not think of it. The little mite we could do to help would count for nothing ; why should we harrow ourselves about it ? The world around us seems to be so beautiful ; why should we discover that it is ugly and wretched ? The best way is to cover up harrowing things decently, and not to worry too much,” I added. “I feel sure that suffering is pretty equally distributed.”

It was as if I had touched a match and it suddenly ignited.

“Blessed are the strong,” he muttered to himself, “for they shall prey on the weak!” And then aloud to me: “Ah, those poor women! You, in the upper classes, as the fashion of speech runs,—though, you know, I don’t think we have any right to talk of either upper or lower,—you must excuse my plainness; you are apt to reason that because these others have tangible wants, and pressing material needs, they have not also those finer feelings and spiritual yearnings which the upper class is supposed to reserve for itself. You talk as if you even thought they were happier than yourselves, because they are not educated, and are not supposed to be refined. But ask those who know. *Are* they any happier with their torn and bleeding bodies, and their aching needs of the pressing necessities of existence? You are not insulted, you are not starved.”

In another moment he began to apologise and I

tried to laugh: "You might have added that *I* am not likely to be beaten".

Did he guess that I had rattled on heartlessly because I was wretched? I knew perfectly well what he intended;—to keep my thoughts from running on what had happened on the day of the hunt, and at the same time to make me understand how much happier I should be as a rich man's wife. The sympathy between us was now so strong that he could not keep me from knowing the inner working of his mind. But I tried not to seem aware of it, or to show that I thought he had only accentuated the position.

He looks noble in his bursts of righteous anger, and I was glad to know that under any circumstances he would be loyal to his friend. How, indeed, could he be himself and act otherwise?

5th May.—My foot is quite well, but I am miserable. I wish the pain would come back, which kept me awake at nights. It would be better than that other pain, which wakes me from

my healthy sleep in the dark hours of the night, and makes me wish I were dead. I am afraid that, in spite of looking delicate, my looks are very delusive. In reality I am strong; and this may go on for years. How long will it take to kill me? That is a thing that I do not know, and most certainly I can ask no one. They would guess. *What* would they guess? That is a question which again will be best left unanswered. I cannot even answer it in my diary. Oh me! I am afraid that sometimes in this journal I have tried to be grand,—to write like Marie Bashkirtseff, as I said like a goose in the beginning. But I have long ceased to have any such ridiculous ambitions. I am not clever or different from other women. All I want is a little happiness in my life, a little love, a little home, a little usefulness! It seems after all *so* little to desire. But since I have known Mr. Colville my desires have become moderate. Why, even if I *had* been endowed with many gifts, I should remember that it is the chief who most

generally serve, the stronger gives way to the weaker. Christ came to teach us that lesson.

20th May.—I see less and less of Lord Melton. He is constantly with Miss Caterlot. She is such a splendid horsewoman, and they ride a good deal together. Sometimes I think that she is not at all friendly to me. There is a sort of way in which she looks at me, which makes me think she would be glad enough to discover anything unfavourable about me, and that she would not scruple to use me to serve her own ends. Ah, well, the only comfort is that there is nothing absolutely wrong for her to discover. How could there be anything wrong connected with so good a man as Mr. Colville? Otherwise Irene Caterlot would be much better suited to make Percy happy than I can ever be. If I thought he cared for me much, a great sorrow for him as well as for myself would be knocking at my heart. But if my love is useless to him, if I feel sure that I shall never be able to please him, and that he may be angry on his side

if I do not conform my life to his wishes,—and if —if—it is a sort of thralldom; and if I have confidence in my own powers, my own youth, my own individuality, ought I not to free myself from it?

6th June.—It is long since I have written. Things are changed. Mr. Colville is going, if Percy will let him do so. I cannot tell how soon, but it is only a question of time. No doubt he feels as I do, that it will be best to break through this state of things. Yes, I think it will be best. Whatever is most right is always best. The house which he has been at work upon for some time is almost finished. All that has yet to be done to it can be easily finished by workmen if Percy will dispense with finishing the frescoes. I will try to be glad that he is going. What is my state of mind respecting him? Would it not be more honest after all for me to face the question and put it down on paper? Need I adopt an inquiry—a judicial tone towards myself? If I am doing like other girls—marrying, as they

call it, *well*—why should I sit in judgment on myself? Why should I expect my morality to be so superior to that of the age? Even Mr. Colville seems to think that my duty is plain—to keep firmly to my engagement; even he does not seem to reflect that because I have made a hasty and foolish promise, I am not justified in perjuring myself before the altar.

How far should self-sacrifice and calm acquiescence go? A doctrine, tempting in many respects, and dating from the Middle Ages, teaches that souls should accept their martyrdom as a mode of cleansing in this life. I can see how that idea would be thankfully welcomed by morbid people, and how it would reconcile a girl to passive endurance throughout her life. But, supposing it should not be true? No horror could be greater than for a martyr at the stake to find out at the last minute that the martyrdom had not been required of him.

8th June.—I feel strange and half ashamed when

I compare myself with other girls—finished women of the world like Miss Caterlot, for instance. I wonder if they would despise me if they knew that I was secretly romantic. Every one ought to be in touch with the age. And most women of the present day are so ashamed of anything sentimental that one would think the right way was to talk of all men as if they were only to be tolerated. To make a hero of one of them? How shameful! I ought to try to be a little more up to date.

16th June.—If I am at peace with myself nothing should disturb me ; but if I am not at peace is it not the right way to try to get out of this emotional unrest? I have been thinking much of this peace lately, and it reminds me of those pictures of Doré's *Paradise* in which he tried to illustrate that grand idea of Dante's—that there must be an inner circle of bliss, towards which all life and all light must tend, till at last it is focussed as in a centre. What do I know about such things?—I, who till lately have lived for myself. What right have I

to long for a wider and freer range of association with my fellow-creatures? They say that most fashionable women, when they are discontented with their own existence, begin to fancy they can do good to their poorer neighbours; but I hope I am not conceited enough to fall into that snare. It would be a privilege, but I am not fit for it.

No; I try to fall back on the question of what is the most right—what has to be done *first*—the immediate issue of which may give me a wider outlook on the whole situation. That is all very well for books, or for a man like Carlyle; but when one puts it to the test it does not help a girl like me.

Good-bye, my journal! I have done with fine writing, or even with trying to write good grammar. I am a poor helpless girl, seeking in vain for some one to help me.

CHAPTER X.

A DIFFICULT POSITION.

IT was a relief to Norman Colville to find that the lessons he had been asked to give to Althea Le Geyt did not necessitate staying indoors during the days when every ounce of sunshine was valuable. There were plenty of subjects near the house, and actually in view of the windows, to which he could take his pupil when it was necessary to dispense with chaperons.

But Lord Melton, as he had given him to understand, was not old-fashioned, and did not wish to hamper his future wife with absurd and stiff regulations. "Give her her head," Mrs. Le Geyt had recommended from the first. "She is a girl to be trusted ; and if you attempt to control her too much at the very outset of your matrimonial venture you

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will only frighten her; she has been used to her liberty.”

He had never been sentimental, and had been conscious of rather liking it when the elder lady further explained that the present generation differed from those which had preceded it, mildly hinting that Althea had her own notions, but was at present so much of a child that it would be better not to worry her with too many demonstrations of devotion. Lord Melton had laughed, and declared that it exactly suited him, and that he liked a woman to have pluck, and no more wished to be tied to her apron strings than she to him.

Nobody knew that her daughter had expressed herself somewhat strongly on these points.

Colville would have laughed too, had he been consulted in the beginning, and would have said that Melton's *fiancée* was safe enough with him. He would rightly have considered it despicable to have taken advantage of his friend's kindness; and though that kindness seemed at times to amount

to carelessness, he would have looked upon it as a depth of moral degradation to allow himself to be swayed by such indifference. But the drooping attitude of the girl, and her half-guilty air during the time when she lay on the sofa with her foot bandaged, as if dazed as yet from the shock she had received, made him feel as if his own coolness was not without a suspicion of heartlessness.

Perhaps, as he thought, it was because he had given himself out as wedded to his art, that his pupil became by degrees less unfettered in her intercourse with him. He began to know her as she was—a quick and intelligent companion, catching a thought from the expression of a face, as she caught an idea when he suggested it to her in the painting lessons. And there were a hundred and one little things, very common amongst women of rapid intuition and quick perception, which were continually surprising him in their intercourse.

And as he knew her he could not help wondering

how it was possible for such a girl to care greatly for the man whom she had so soon to marry. He credited her with nothing less than a strong attachment to this man ; for however the mother might have schemed or plotted, he could think of nothing of that sort in connection with the innocent daughter.

And he began to be sorry for her. When the veil of passion should be torn in tatters, and when she should no longer see her husband through the becoming medium with which her feeling had endowed him, but simply as he was—hard, shallow, and narrow-minded, in spite of all his affected culture—what would become of her ?

He tried not to speculate on this riddle one night, as he blew the wreaths of smoke from his pipe, and paced up and down the terrace, when the stars were all out, as if the sight of the immensities might help him to stop thoughts which had no right to intrude themselves upon him. But it was such an essential part of his nature to be interested

in all humanity that it was impossible to prevent his mind from inquiring how it all had happened. And, oh, the pity of it, if with the fine possibilities of a nature like hers, she should outgrow her husband—a consummation which he foresaw to be almost inevitable! For what was to prevent the ordinary and natural evolution, a state of things in which she would be growing every day, developing whilst he deteriorated? He could hear Melton even now laughing and talking with the other women: their voices came to him through the open windows of the drawing-room; it was one of his jokes that he constantly went “girl-stalking,” and he did not know, what Colville saw, that the noble girl to whom he was engaged was already writhing inwardly at the faults which she saw in him, whilst in all gratitude she was forced to make excuses for him.

How demented Melton was to let this engagement drag on! Why did he not secure her at once when first she had been dazzled by his offer?

For the longer the present situation continued, the more intolerable it would become. Well, what business was it of his? It would only add another to the ninety-nine marriages which cynics said could be counted out of every hundred; and if in the end it proved to be fatal to the heroic qualities which he perceived to be latent in Althea Le Geyt, that too was no business of his.

He had nothing to do with the *dénouement*, though the position had suddenly become complicated by the appearance of Irene Caterlot. Irene and Lord Melton had plenty to say to each other; and day after day it was probably becoming more impossible for Althea to glorify her future husband through the medium of her imagination, since Melton, in his provoking good nature, his satisfaction with himself, and his way of treating her, as if she were his assured possession, must have been trying to her high spirit.

"It does not matter whether I draw well or ill," she had said to Colville one day. "It is only *pour*

passer le temps till I do the ornamental for the rest of my life. My future lord wishes to lap me in swan's down, and to take me out occasionally to be looked at ; no doubt it is kind of him." And Colville was vexed with himself for thinking that her laugh had a sound of bitterness in it.

It was the first time she had alluded openly to Melton, and there was a little defiance in her voice which contrasted with her usual gracious tones. For now that she has thrown off her mask of coldness Norman was bound to confess that there is something fascinating and winning about her.

What was it to him ? He did not want to be bitten by foolish admiration for the pretty and gracious ways of any woman : and yet Althea was not a wax doll ; she had force and magnanimity of character. She would have much influence as a *châtelaine*, and she was the stronger of the two, and might mould Melton as she pleased. If he could only get her to interest herself in the outcasts of the race whose poverty meant discredit and whose

misfortune was too often treated as a crime, and if he could make her understand that even for the tenants on that estate there was often only the workhouse after a toilsome and laborious life, harassed by carking care, he would have been glad. "So long as women like this who are capable of better things are content to profit by the inequalities of human life and will not see that, under healthier and happier conditions, humanity could rise to heights undreamt of, the thing is hopeless," he said.

"Heaven help me," he thought in exasperation, as time went on, "here am I, in daily, almost hourly intercourse with one of the most beautiful and engaging girls in the world. She is allowed unfettered liberty on account of their belief in *noblesse oblige*. She could not stoop to marry a worker like myself, neither has the worker any attractions according to Melton's creed. And I myself am equally hampered, though in rather a different way, by that same old idea of *noblesse*. I could not stoop to do a dishonourable

deed. And nobody guesses that my position is that of a man tied to a stake ; and that, especially since Irene Caterlot came to stay here, I am worried—not only by little indefinable insults, but by agonies intolerable. I try to persuade myself that my pretensions, under any circumstances, would be considered impossible,—as if I were made of different flesh and blood from Melton, and as if flesh and blood, the stuff that circulates in my veins, had no right to be inflammable. Mrs. Le Geyt would think so.”

The mother was already busy with questions about the trousseau. Did Mr. Colville think that this tea-gown or that costume would suit the style of her daughter's beauty? And sometimes he caught himself thinking a little bitterly that wealth was so much the keystone of this woman's thoughts, that in the confidence of her mammon-worship she did not think of *him*—despoiled as he was by his own act of this world's goods—as if he were an ordinary man. Or was it that she was so

astute an actress as to like to show him that she was afraid of nothing?

At any rate she always attitudinised as the perfect mother; and most people believed in her. "After all," he thought to himself, "she probably believes that, whether these two people care for each other or not, she is doing the best for her daughter."

She never liked to admit that she was at all anxious on the subject of hurrying the marriage with "dear Lord Melton".

"Of course, they were shy—all lovers are; and my daughter is so reserved she would never wear her heart on her sleeve,—*never*," she said to Colville in one of her confidential moods.

And the girl was always docile in her mother's presence, sometimes just a little apathetic, as she was in Melton's, but never contradictory. To damp Mrs. Le Geyt, or to interfere with her pretty little speeches about "dear Lord Melton," would have been to strike a *coup d'état* in that lady's political world. But sometimes Colville fancied he had seen

her wince. If she did so, ever so little, the widow was immediately aware of it, and adapted herself accordingly. She was a born diplomatist, never showing her hand, and knowing when to alter her tactics according to circumstances ; too shrewd to have any infallible red-tapism.

“Dear Lord Melton,” she said with her head on one side, “has such perfect tact—he never pays too much attention to his *fiancée* in company.” And then, as a burst of laughter came from the corner of the room where he was, as usual, surrounded by a circle of admiring friends—Irene Caterlot amongst them : “He has such a wonderful amount of ballast—it is so impossible to turn his head”.

Norman was conscious of resenting the mother's interference. Her fingers were not delicate enough to meddle in such matters.

Why did she address herself especially to *him* ? Imagination conjured up implied reproof ; and honour took umbrage at the thought that any one could venture to suspect him,

The time had come when the girl would willingly have unbosomed herself in her great and pressing need of helpful advice. But Mrs. Le Geyt, who suspected something amiss, was still firm in not encouraging her daughter to speak. She was far too astute to lead her to close and full confession when the great thing was to ward confession off. A thing spoken would be a thing acknowledged. No; at all costs, Althea must not be allowed to get nervous. The mother's cue for the first time was to hurry the marriage.

She consoled herself with the trousseau, and had patterns sent from London for the wedding dress.

"It must take place in the autumn—do not put it off longer than that—it is my last bit of advice to you. Young men do not like advice, neither do they like to abridge the courting time," she said, putting her head on one side as she tried to impress her opinion on Lord Melton. "No, I do not doubt you—do not think such a thing for a moment; you can't think how warmly Althea always speaks

of you behind your back ; she is not expansive, but she is always singing your praises when you cannot hear her ; she is reserved—it will be different when you are married—shy girls always make the best wives.”

It was Mrs. Le Geyt's idea that Lord Melton might amuse himself as much as he liked with other women like Irene Caterlot without slighting her daughter ; and indeed she did not hesitate sily to hint at this. “Some wives are so absurdly jealous,” she said to her future son-in-law ; “and you can't think what a nuisance jealousy is,—how it ruins men's and women's lives. But, thank Heaven, there is not a shadow of jealousy about Althea. I brought her up to have an utter horror of that most detestable fault. Perhaps you may think she rather errs in the opposite direction. Ah ! but you are mistaken if you imagine any such nonsense as that. A jealous wife is an abomination. You are a lucky man ! It is better to have a shy one. Give Althea time, and trust her a little.”

To her daughter she said that certain shares had paid better than she expected, and that it would soon be time for them to return to their own home to attend more thoroughly to the mysteries of millinery. She even hinted at a double trousseau when she wished to invent an excuse for having dresses sent to the house.

"If you do not like white, then look at the grey," she said to account for the introduction of a young woman into their private apartments, who stood in an elegant attitude fluffing the satin up into a kind of pyramid, draping it artistically, and pushing it here and there into graceful folds so as to show off the brilliancy and pearliness of the greys.

But Althea was not interested. It did not escape her mother's notice that, when her foot was better, and there was no longer any excuse for the constant lying down, she still walked with a heavy languor, as if weights were hung on her feet. Her stately mien had gone, and the sparkle had died out of her face. Mrs. Le Geyt began to be afraid

that some change had taken place in her; a change calculated rather to impair than to heighten her attractions.

She was alarmed by it. It was a sudden reminder of a complexity in Althea's character, which seemed at first sight contradictory; and of the fact that, though her daughter's will was a decided one, she was also not free from the weaknesses of her sex. The right thing seemed to be to keep her constantly amused; and as Althea declared that the only thing which amused her at the present time was painting, Mrs. Le Geyt made the mistake of rather encouraging than throwing any hindrance on the painting lessons. Was not Mrs. Armitage the chaperon? It was a little forgotten that Mrs. Armitage was not only weak and indulgent to young people, but that she was also often deaf, and given to napping. Mrs. Le Geyt would have been more on her guard could she have guessed that beneath her daughter's appearance of quiet serenity was concealed an

exasperation which sometimes drove her to combativeness.

Straws show which way the wind blows. And Colville himself was surprised when he found that though Miss Le Geyt had hitherto answered him coldly and indifferently when he had tried to turn the conversation to the needs of the suffering poor, she had now suddenly altered her tone.

It was in the glamour of the evening hour just as the sunset light was flooding the large almost empty room, bright with armorial bearings, in which the girl took her lessons, and falling on her through the lozenge-shaped panes of glass, that she first of all alluded, somewhat abruptly, to her consciousness of her own mistake in having spoken of the condition of her poorer sisters, as if she were without sensibility or natural emotion.

"You must have known that it was not my true self that spoke," she said, suddenly looking up, and putting down her brush. "But I did not like to allow that you were right and I was wrong. I

was trying to make myself into a machine when I met you."

And then she began to talk of her burning desire to help. He knew that this was no fashionable cant ; and that, in fact, he had endeavoured to bring about some such change in her way of thinking. But he was alarmed at finding it sudden and excessive—a part of the spiritual force which had lately been developing in her. With all his old dread of contagious enthusiasm, he guessed by a corresponding thrill of emotion, at this woman's readiness to strip herself of everything, and to imitate the *rôle* of self-sacrificing martyrs, if she could only escape from the embarrassment of a false position. But it was his duty to prevent any complications of a tender sort ; and he reminded himself that he must be restrained by considerations of honour and reason, as she lifted her eyes to his, and asked : "Would he not help her to carry out her purposes ? Could he not devise some plan ?" And then she

complained that she had less freedom than the majority of her sex.

"You must look upon me as a sort of pedagogue," he answered lightly ; "but, because I give you lessons in painting, it does not follow that I am able to teach you about anything else."

"Oh, it is all so reasonable—so cut and dried in my life—one feels the futility of contending when one's life is marked out for one," she said, pushing her hair from her brows in a nervous way which he had lately noticed ; "if I could only get into middle-aged ways of looking at things. It seems to me that *nobody* will help me—not even you."

He answered, as he stooped lower over the painting : "You are to be a Lady Bountiful—a benevolent *châtelaine*. I must keep to my own sphere. The programme of *my* life is work. I would not alter it if I could."

She said in a low tone : "I wish *mine* could be the same".

He took no notice of her answer, as he continued

to busy himself with the finishing touches on the foreground.

Yet he was suffering keenly—conscious of his cruelty, and the pain he was inflicting on her as well as upon himself, when—looking up in another moment and noticing the solicitous air of her eager vivid face—he thought it better to remind her that they had to go on with their study, and that it would be an interruption to the lesson to allow their talk to wander to other topics.

“Every day I feel myself a brute, and now I shall have to pour cold water on her noblest aspirations,” he said to himself that evening when the hour was over and he was free to fling himself in a state of exhaustion on the couch in his own room, wiping the drops of agony from his brow.

He had been almost rude to her. She must have felt herself repulsed in a way which she did not understand, for after all she had only spoken about duty. And yet common-sense had compelled him to answer in that way. She had blushed when she

had spoken ; and though he called himself a conceited prig for being afraid that he saw through the meaning of the blush, he was human enough to remember it and to attach importance to it.

CHAPTER XI.

ALTHEA BREAKS DOWN.

TO the outside world Norman Colville and Irene Caterlot were chance acquaintances who had accidentally met before, who had very little in common, and were on terms of cold politeness. And when Norman Colville sometimes fancied that Miss Caterlot was an enemy who had determined to revenge a slight, he reproached himself for yielding to fancies, and dismissed the matter from his thoughts.

If he was disgusted by the manner in which she monopolised Lord Melton, it was certainly not his business to interfere.

He did not guess that she would take advantage of the intimate way in which she was thrown into her host's society to make innuendoes at his own

expense, and that of Melton's betrothed. Had he known it he might have comforted himself by remembering that Melton had shown himself to be dull, indifferent, and almost lethargic about the various pursuits which interested Althea. It might have been said of him and his future wife that if they did not like the same things, or even the same people, he allowed her to go her own way, and was at least a gentleman, and would listen to no detracting talk at her expense.

Irene had to change her tone when his brows contracted, and he answered her first insinuations more haughtily than usual :—

“I never trouble myself about gossip. I leave the women to concern themselves about society's opinions. They want something to flavour their afternoon tea ; sugar is out of fashion, and acid must do instead.”

Miss Caterlot was wise enough to say no more just then ; but she was far too clever to have hinted at a detraction had she not been perfectly certain

that there was a solid foundation for her talk. She had sown her seed carefully, and knew that a plentiful crop would be almost certain to come up. If any one had told her it would be like the sowing of dragons' teeth, she would only have laughed and appreciated the compliment.

Meanwhile Althea went about looking sad and speaking little. The alteration in her was so apparent that her mother tried to account for it by attributing it to the sudden heat which set in towards the end of June when the wet weather was over.

The change in the weather involved a change of plans ; and picnic parties, and riding parties late in the afternoons, once more took the place of amateur acting, dancing and music.

It was towards the middle of July that Lord Melton, roused to a reaction of feeling by the hints which Irene Caterlot had let fall, tried for the first time to insist on his *fiancée* joining these excursions. But he found her obstinate on the subject. She

said that her mother was right—the warm weather had prostrated her, and the riding would be too fatiguing for her at present. Then she suddenly paled when he joked about exerting his marital authority.

Never had the feeling which revolted her as if she were bound to him against her will been more evident than when he forced himself on one occasion into the room where she was taking her painting lesson, trying in a jovial way to enforce his authority.

“You must really come with us. I refuse to let you off, and *I* must be the master,” he said in a bantering tone; “you are not looking well. This painting is too much for you. I must send this fellow away, with his nasty messes and turpentine smells.”

Then, half in earnest and half in play, he stooped over her, and touched her forehead with his lips.

It was a crisis ; and by the time that Melton had

strolled out of the room, Norman saw that she had lost her presence of mind.

She was struggling with herself, and scarcely able to hold her brush. Her voice dropped almost to a whisper, and her face was damp with moisture as she said, speaking with lips which seemed to cleave together, for they were stiff and dry, and she could hardly pronounce the words: "Don't let him come again; why—why—did he kiss me before you? Is there to be no privacy, no consideration? *he* to talk of being *master*!" and she rubbed her face with her embroidered handkerchief, as if to destroy the recollection of the kiss.

Norman saw that her nervous condition was such that she was unable to restrain herself, and that any word on his part might only increase her excitement.

He was astonished at the trembling of his own fingers, which he steadied by the force of his will as soon as he noticed the symptoms of his cowardice.

He kept his eyes fixed on his work ; but at the next moment she had thrown down her brush, and rising suddenly to her feet, stood at the window. Indiscreet it might be ; but she was evidently no longer able to control herself, as she spoke in short, sharp sentences, her state of feeling not admitting of lengthened speech.

“ I think I shall go away. I begin to feel I can no longer bear it,—do you not see it ? I can claim no individuality. I am a part of this old historic house, of this park and these pleasure grounds. I am not allowed to be myself. Oh ! I know what you are thinking. I can quite understand how men like you think that women seldom *mean* what they say, whilst they honestly believe themselves to be in earnest ; but I tell you that I would rather be a governess or a barmaid.”

It was inartistically done. It was too sudden a surprise ; there was an unfortunate recklessness about her. He felt like a brute when he saw the blood rushing to her brow and neck, and knew

that she was burning with shame to the very tips of her sensitive fingers, and that he must increase that shame as he spoke, as if he were cold, insensate, and almost brutal.

“Most people find it a mistake to give vent to their emotions. It is a truism to say that duty comes before emotion.”

And then he ventured to look at her, regretting his impulse as he did so. For the light which had leapt to her face seemed to dazzle his eyes, and to threaten to set fire to something in his own being.

It was like the blower of a grate suddenly raised and illuminating everything with a blaze. And he was struck by the grandeur of her pose. She was a magnificent creature; and he could not help thinking of her as the heiress of influences from ages past which had combined to mould her and make her what she was—if her mother's tale was true—as she stood in the embrasure of the window with the background of stained glass.

“Try to be a friend to me,” she pleaded, conscious of a revulsion of feeling, and making an effort to speak in a slower and more deliberate way; “I want people to respect me on my own merits, and not to have exaggerated notions of what I ought to be. Remember, that when you came to me first, I could not even draw a straight line properly. Since then I have learnt to draw many lines. I have begun to wake up and see things differently. To be filled with a sort of rage and discontent with oneself is perhaps a good thing—so I have been told. But to find one’s way out of a sort of trap is not so easy. Emotions are ephemeral, as you say—one can’t live up to these transient moods. I suppose the best way is to make up one’s mind that nothing really matters. If one is to encourage one’s feelings to expend their full force, it may mean sleeplessness, invalidism, wretchedness, and everything that is miserable, while, after all, one *has* to bear one’s life.”

“That is exactly it,” he answered, catching at

the cue she had given him. "You are vexed just now. You are worried, but you must not allow yourself to be paralysed because you have come upon the new and unexplored regions which exist in most of our hearts, and which most of us try to hide even from ourselves. You are good enough to ask me to be your friend. Well, then, my advice is, divert your mind. Do for yourself what time will do. Take Lord Melton's advice. Go out more in the open air. Join in the rides and the excursions. In a few days or a few weeks you will cease to have these morbid thoughts."

He was a little ashamed of his own philosophy, for he knew that her impulse was to help herself; and in his secret heart he thought it hard that just because she happened to be a woman, the natural energy of her disposition could not help her.

She sat down again to her work; but she had not the cunning of concealment, and was too conscious of her mistake to be able to assume her former *rôle*.

“I am tired, and can paint no more to-day,” she said, once more throwing down her brush and walking to the window. “Your advice is a little hard, for I shall never be allowed to be myself. I have no right to complain, for it is the same with most of the girls I know, and I have not the poor excuse of pretending that I was deceived. But you do not know what it is. Excuse me ; I forgot, you once did, and *you* had the courage to free yourself from it! *I* am not allowed to have that courage. I must be a bit of machinery, caught in the frantic whirl of life which goes on now and again in what they call the ‘season,’ or stagnates in a country-house, till one becomes as devoid of character as one of those stones which you see from this window flanking the gravel path.”

She was very pale now that the rush of colour to her face and neck had died away. The evening was a lovely one, and the light from the western sun fell full upon her girlish figure as she leant against the embrasure, her eyes raised to watch the

flight of a bird, the chiselling of the lip and brow suggesting to Norman Colville the study of some saint for a stained glass device, or the sculpturing of a statue.

Again he would not allow his eyes to rest on her, but busied himself with collecting brushes, colours and palettes. Then he bowed gravely, and was about to leave the room.

"We will go on again to-morrow," he said, "when you feel less tired."

"You jest!" she cried angrily, turning away from her gazing attitude, while a wave of passionate feeling passed over her beautiful face. "We can *never* go on again. You have been taking an unfair advantage of me. You have been trying to humanise me—the whole of my education has been to dehumanise. I cannot afford to wait and think." There was passion in her voice as she continued: "I know that you have been judging me, but I do not choose for you to judge. You have chosen to be free yourself; and yet because I am a woman you

would deny freedom to *me*. If I have been wrong in speaking out, it is because I have been driven to it. And the pain and humiliation of my own shortcomings must be on my own head."

CHAPTER XII.

IRENE MAKES MISCHIEF.

NORMAN COLVILLE'S feelings were by no means enviable when he found himself the only occupant of the room. Though the day was warm, it had now suddenly become chilly, and an icy sensation seemed to penetrate to the marrow of his bones.

"I should have brought dishonour on myself if I had spoken to her in any other way. I cannot parley with any excuses for wrong-doing," he said to himself: "but is it true, as she says, that it is partly my fault? Is it *my* fault that she has been subjected to new and salutary influences, and that, had she been a woman in my own rank of life, unfettered by this promise, we could have braved fortune, and fought the world together? I never found a girl with a clearer brain and greater ardour

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for the things which are noble and of good report. She is by nature an enthusiast, and Nature has made a terrible mistake in planting an enthusiast in this God-forsaken place. Will she ever forget—ever grow into the ordinary, selfish, pleasure-loving, middle-aged woman?”

He had not liked to answer her, for he hoped she might forget; though he knew well that such forgetfulness might be left to women who prided themselves on being conventional, and who were not cursed with the possession of hearts. After all, he had done the only thing which had seemed to him possible to do. “I expect,” he added to himself, “that the reason so many women wish for father confessors is not so much that they wish to amend their lives as because they must find some safety-valve for their tormenting fears, and the irritability caused by their minds feeding on themselves.”

“She might be right to free herself,” he found himself acknowledging, as he paced up and down

his room about an hour afterwards; "but it was impossible that *I* could give her such advice."

And yet it was an awful ordeal.

"I am not an impressionable schoolboy," he said, as he paced about, backwards and forwards, as if the bodily exercise might do something to relieve the tension of his brain; "but I am in honour bound to get away from this place."

The whole thing was so intolerable that even he, who was so ready to take blame upon himself, was conscious of a measure of reluctance and reserve in his judgment of self which was not usual to him. He was loth to acknowledge how deeply he had been stirred when she had blushed so distressfully, when the proud and angry colour had flooded her face and neck, and when—oh the secret shame of it—a throb of feeling which he would not confess had made him fear to look into her face. What was that feeling but a thing from which he now shrank back shivering and recoiling,

—a thing which he had never dared to set before himself as an ultimate purpose?

He knew that it must be reasoned with, and put an end to at once.

There must be no confusion in his mind. If any friend were to rescue this poor girl from her strait it must be a disinterested friend.

And yet his heart was filled with an aching pity for her. He had so accustomed himself to pity and help all suffering humanity that he could not but sorrow acutely for what must have seemed to her the cruelty, almost amounting to brutality, with which he had been compelled to ignore the frankness of her confidence.

For she was right—undoubtedly right! If she had committed one wrong by her hasty engagement, she would make this wrong a thousand times worse by marriage. For a woman of this sort, with her high ideals, to be handicapped by what they called a brilliant alliance, which meant that she would be obliged to spend the whole of her life

with an unsympathetic companion in a constant round of what was called pleasure, but which in her case would be misery—always at the beck and call of other people, and with seldom the luxury of being alone—till at last, like Madame du Deffand, she might grow to have a horror of solitude in her old age, and never any time for outside interests—the fate would be a terrible one.

It was characteristic of Colville's peculiar way of thinking, that such an end seemed to him to be awful. For a woman like Althea Le Geyt to be tied to a man who took so little interest in her ideas and ways of thinking, as Melton was terrible.

"Why," he said to himself, "she is scarcely successful even in her attempts to amuse him; he chooses others, and he seems to care almost as much for his horses and his dogs."

Well, it was a good thing that the painting lessons were to be given up—he could not bear the torture of them any more; and now they would end naturally, without leading to further mischief.

He might have saved himself the trouble of self-congratulation if he could have known the other forces which were at work in the house.

For Lord Melton, who had hitherto had no suspicion of the comedy which was being enacted before his eyes, and which, as Irene Caterlot did not hesitate to hint, might be the prologue of a tragedy, had begun for the first time to be suspicious. Till now, he had been perfectly content with the code of etiquette which prevailed in his society. That a girl had a right to marry in defiance of her only parent's wishes would have seemed to him immoral; and he decidedly approved of the sort of bargain to which the people with whom he associated had generally narrowed marriage. That a few love matches should be contracted by a section of his class did not interfere with the code which made it by no means right for any girl to marry without substantial advantages. That he could supply those substantial advantages in return for Althea's air of personal

distinction, and the attractive appearance which had lately been further enhanced by the beautiful garments worn with so much grace and effect, had hitherto seemed to him perfectly satisfactory. Few people could be expected to give any clear account of what had happened in the most important event of their lives,—the grasping of hands and exchanging of vows,—and Melton was not one of those few. He had an indistinct idea that he owed a good deal to Mrs. Le Geyt. If his sensations had ever been violent, they were certainly not violent now : he being one of those men likely quickly to tire of the enchanting novelty of a new relationship.

It had not escaped other people in the house that latterly when he had looked at his beautiful *fiancée* with his air of eager proprietorship, she had winced ; and that, when she had been off her guard, she had sometimes returned the look with another which suggested personal antipathy—an antipathy apparent to no one so much as to Irene

Caterlot, so perfectly was it veiled by the dignity and graciousness of manner with which Althea had set herself to perform what she had considered to be her duty.

“Duty!” as Norman had said indignantly to himself. “Is not that society rotten to the core which calls black white, and white black? Is not that sense of duty which impels a woman to hide the feeling dominating her mind a false one? Is it not acting which recoils upon herself when she finds herself bound to a man by adamant ties, and often the very devil’s mischief is brewed in consequence?”

If much was said behind his back, and if Irene Caterlot went about hinting that her mind was agitated by very painful thoughts, not hesitating to speak of Norman Colville as a male flirt of the worst type, and declaring that *she* had reason to know the truth; Lord Melton had remained in blissful ignorance till lately.

“No wonder,” as Irene said, “it was as easy to

deceive him as possible ; he was quite in a woman's power." She did not add that in her own clever little scheme all the elements of success had been based on his capability for being deceived, and that she had often laughed to herself as she had thought that—if he were once freed from Althea—it would be as easy to turn him round her little finger as if he were a child.

When she sighed deeply during one of the rides, in which they always managed to get ahead of the rest of the party, and then mysteriously refused to explain the reason of the sigh, her host had an idea that she was behaving rather strangely.

"It is only because I care so much about *you* ; you are too good to have your confidence abused, and I unfortunately am one of the people who cannot help speaking out," she said after a pause, when their horses halted to drink a little water at a stream which flowed beside the road. He thought she was oddly excited, but he could scarcely be

angry, for her large dark eyes were veiled, and tears were trembling on their lashes.

“It is what we spoke about the other day, and till now I have refused to say anything more about it. Indeed, I know that I have done almost the most disagreeable thing it is possible for a woman to do. I have tried to put you on your guard,—forgive me if I have gone too far.” Then she added, dropping her voice almost to a whisper: “Does it not strike you that Miss Le Geyt is not looking well, and that you throw her too much in the power of the other person? All this may be very trying for her. She is so very young, and there are such great excuses to be made for her. Excuse me, you should not have thrown them so much together.” Lord Melton drew his breath rapidly, his eyes grew hard, and his face took firmer lines.

“If you hear anybody talking in that way, you can easily answer that the gossip is untrue,” he panted, rather than said.

"I know what I am risking. I am making you dreadfully angry ; and I care too much about you to like to do that," she added, as she launched into rapid exclamations. It was true that he would never have forgiven her had she been a man. His face flushed a deep purple hue as he listened to her, and the hand with which he held the whip clenched itself tightly.

"Some one has told you a pack of lies," he said contemptuously ; and then rode moodily on without further speaking.

But his eyes were being opened to what he had never noticed before. It was undeniable that Althea had lost appetite lately, that she had said little, and had even winced at his caresses. He had never really cared for her, but he would feel her loss acutely. He estimated her worth as his future wife, and he was a man keenly to resent any slur upon his honour.

Miss Caterlot's suggestion had first of all seemed to be revolting, but as he rode on he began to think there might be truth in it.

“If you take the trouble you can easily find out for yourself,” was the utmost which that lady had thought it wise to add as they returned together in all but unbroken silence.

CHAPTER XIII.

HONOUR BEFORE LOVE.

LORD MELTON was a little ashamed of himself when after Irene's suggestion that he had better take the trouble to find out for himself, he managed to loiter outside the room in which his future wife generally took her painting lesson, on the afternoon when Norman Colville and Althea Le Geyt had agreed to part. Even then he still preserved the instincts of a gentleman, and would not condescend to act the part of a spy. But when he had paced for some time up and down the corridor which separated the large, barely furnished apartment that had been chosen for a studio from the rest of the rambling house, and when at last Althea came out with her head bent down, her cheeks flushed and so evidently occupied with her own thoughts that

she did not even see him,—he felt as if Miss Caterlot's worst surmises had been proved to be correct.

He did not speak to Althea. He was perhaps afraid of doing so. He had never taken her lightly. Her personality had always seemed to place her on a different platform from that of ordinary women, and it was indeed that which had induced him to choose her for his wife.

He felt even now that it would be dreadful to lose her. Irene Caterlot had proved herself to be a more amusing companion, but Irene did not inspire the majority of men with the sort of reverence which encompassed Althea as with a garment. Ever since she had been engaged to him this reticence with which she had treated other men had seemed to increase, and he had been grateful to her for it. That she could even condescend to flirt with a drawing-master had never entered his imagination; and it was because he believed the blame to rest entirely with Colville

that he determined to take no notice of what had happened that night.

The following morning was fine and bright, and there was a peculiar stillness in the air. It was still the time of roses. There were roses everywhere, the Gloire de Dijon and the Maréchal Niel, the old-fashioned moss roses and the dainty China ones. They were of every colour, from the deepest crimson and maroon to the daintiest pink and lemon shades, as well as the richest amber and carmine. The air was redolent of their luscious fragrance, and Melton needed no excuse for taking his artist friend to see the roses which were growing in clusters and masses, either in the garden or the greenhouses.

It was immediately after breakfast ; and the early sunshine—not so scorching and more mellow than the Italian sunshine—was flooding every flower-bed and parterre. It was not a morning to spoil by the introduction of a jarring note.

“It spoils one’s digestion,” as Melton was

fond of saying, "to have wrangles of any sort."

But the expression of his face now meant more than what he was accustomed in his easy way to call a "wrangle". Anger and chagrin convulsed his features, and it was impossible not to notice his ghastly pallor as he said, kicking the gravel violently :—

"What would you advise me to do if a serpent crawled into my garden?"

"This garden of the Hesperides?" answered Colville jocularly. "That would depend on whether it were a harmless snake—few snakes are poisonous in this country," he added, without having the faintest idea of what he was driving at.

"There was a story of one reptile which a man warmed in his bosom and let it lie by his own hearth, and the brute crept noiselessly on to sting his nearest and ——"

He did not finish the sentence, being as afraid of giving utterance to sentiment as most Englishmen are.

But Colville had no longer any reason to speculate as to his meaning. He was as white as his accuser, as he answered, in rather a quieter tone than usual :—

“There is no doubt as to what he should have done—he should have put his foot on the poisonous thing and scotched it.”

“Before the mischief was done?”

“Yes ; before the mischief was done.”

“I was too great a fool. The old crones will be delighted. They say there is a curse upon our building mania ; the prophecy was bound to be fulfilled.” Lord Melton laughed ; it was a laugh which grated on the nerves.

And the two men looked straight into each other’s eyes, neither of them flinching.

Pleasant recollections of the days of boyhood rushed upon Colville’s memory, and helped him to restrain himself.

There was a stillness as if all nature sympathised with their intensity of feeling in that pause. A yellow

opaline lustre from the mellow sunshine was falling on a rough stone wall, adorned with a clematis in all its magnificence of purple blossom. A peacock butterfly fluttering on the flowers added a bit of jewel-like colouring to the wall which separated the flower garden from the kitchen garden, and which was lichen-stained and moss-grown where not covered by the fresh green leaves and regal blossoms of the clematis. The birds had ceased to warble their morning ditties, but the twitter of a clear-voiced blackbird broke suddenly on the silence. All these details seemed to stereotype themselves on the memory, or on the retina of Colville's eye, as if he should be doomed never to forget them. He even noticed the wreaths of smoke rising from the chimney of one of the tenants' cottages, where a cameo-like peep of the misty blue distance, vaporous with the heat, could be seen through a gap in one of the hedges. His artist eye seemed to be endowed with a power of closer observation than usual, as the man who had hitherto been kind to him, and

whose kindness he had tried to return, stood before him, mute and rigid in the clutches of the vulture of jealous agony. The pause was broken at last.

"You are a damnable hypocrite!" Melton hissed the words rather than said them.

Even then Colville did not lose his calmness.

"Most of the hypocrites in the world are unconscious hypocrites," he answered, feeling that if he had been insulted, the circumstances were such that it would be cowardly for him to retort, and that for a woman's sake it would be better to hold his tongue.

"You have seduced the girl I love from her allegiance to me."

Then, indeed, it was impossible for him to keep up his self-control.

"You have used strong words," he said; "and they are needed on my side now. It is a wicked lie."

"The offence of which I accuse you is that of stealing her affections—of course, no one but an idiot would think I hinted at anything else," said

Melton, suddenly remembering himself, and walking up and down the gravel path as if he were trying to calm his delirium. "She was taken with you when you first came. Women are fools to fly into rhapsodies over a fellow's privations, and sentimental nonsense of that sort. It is not my fault if I never thought of you as a formidable rival!" And he burst into a mocking laugh at the ironical turn which events were taking. "But I have been a blockhead—a damned, trustful, ridiculous blockhead. I forgot what women were made of, or I ought to have noticed long ago that my future wife was evidently uneasy about something. Why, rot it all, since you came here she has been as formal and reserved as if she were rehearsing a part, and lately she seems to have forgotten how to smile."

He was repeating Irene's words; and the sting of them consisted in the fact that there was some truth in them.

"I must ask you not to couple a lady's name with mine without that lady's leave," said Colville, speak-

ing with a painful effort, and aware that he must be content to stand on the defensive. "As you are entering into matters of which you know nothing, I think it best to tell you that the lady in question has anticipated you in letting me know that for the present, at least, she has tired of her painting lessons, and would take no more instruction from me even if I remained in the house."

Lord Melton looked puzzled. He was the last man to like to strip off the thin veneer of civilisation which is supposed to separate an English nobleman from the ploughboy or the savage ; and he felt a little ashamed of the violence of his passion. Once more he remembered that half the gossip which he heard was of no more importance than flying globes of thistledown, and that it was the part of a gentleman not to listen to it.

He had certainly seen Althea leave the room in which she took her lessons in a condition bordering on tears ; but he suddenly remembered that she was easily moved by tales of sorrow, and that it

was possible for one of Colville's tales of the misery of the East End of London to have touched some of the deeper strata of feeling which he and his betrothed did not share.

"Ah, the painting is fatiguing for her; but, if the fellow was too polite to her, it seems she has taken the initiative at once and repulsed him," he was already saying to himself. Althea was reinstated in his good opinion. But a minute or two before he had been telling himself that she would be no such irreparable loss; and that though he might feel the wound for a little while, it would after all be a wound from which he would quickly recover.

It would have been a blow to his vanity; for though he called himself a Radical, he held woman-kind in very real subjection. And that Althea should have escaped him, or that her character should have developed in a mysterious way which led her into distant regions whither he could not follow, would have been sufficient to excite his

rage, and to wake the beast in him. But the reaction was so comforting that he had almost forgotten the presence of the artist who had humiliated himself to screen Althea. His good-humoured indifference was already reasserting itself, with his hatred of jarring discords, unnecessary agitations and disturbing voices, so that he scarcely heard what Colville said, as the latter continued a little stiffly :—

“I must remind you that it was by *your* wish that these painting lessons were begun ; also it was because you urged me that I came here at all. I have long wished to leave, and you would not let me do so. It is perhaps well for me that I can now assert my liberty. To-morrow morning I start for Rome.”

So the chapter was concluded.

“Only a chapter in one’s life,” as Colville said to himself when he packed his boxes that night.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS.

IT would have been easier for him if he had not been obliged to take leave of Althea. It was a misfortune for them both that after a restless night she was out early in the garden, just as he (looking like a brigand in his picturesque, toga-like great-coat purchased in Italy, and his slouch hat drawn over his brows) was setting out for his journey.

The place seemed suddenly to have grown lugubrious with the sunlight trying to struggle through the mists and gloom. And each with stern ideas of duty kept up the solemn pretence of being in ignorance of the secret of the other.

His impulse was to ask her to give him one of the roses fresh with the drops of rain which had fallen during the night. The rain had made them
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look as if they were wet with teardrops, as she held a bunch, which she had just gathered, loosely in her hand. The gift would have been symbolic ; but there were a thousand reasons why he should not accept it. His whole idea still was to do his utmost to defend her, and with this idea he spoke cheerfully.

“ I hope you will be able to do great things when you are Lady Melton. You must not spoil people or overdo it, when I hear of you, as I expect to hear, as one of the greatest lady philanthropists in England. You must not go to the extreme and pet people just because they have been in trouble. Now that I am going I feel a sort of a responsibility, as if what I have told you may seem to be exaggerated, and charity sometimes does more harm than good.” That had always been his fear, and he made the most of it now.

Her fingers played nervously with her dress, and her repressed irritability at the exciting knowledge that he was going to leave her for ever, whilst every

nerve was still thrilling with the consciousness of his presence, betrayed itself in her answer.

“It is so easy for people to talk like that who have not suffered themselves. I never told you how much *I* have suffered in my own life, and it is too late for me to begin to tell you now. I have made too many confidences, and I regret them.”

Decidedly she was the most unguarded of the two; for though the struggle in his heart was as tumultuous as that in hers, he had the courage to answer lightly:—

“Ah, yes, that is what one always feels; it is so easy to make cut and dried maxims for one’s fellow-creatures without knowing anything about them—but you have nothing to reproach yourself for—you ——”

He broke off. It was wisest to say no more. He must fight his own battle as usual without sympathy. She must never know how dear she was to him.

He did not even allow himself to hold the little hand which she placed in his.

“Will you ever think of me?” she asked piteously.

And the man answered huskily: “As I shall wish you to think of me if you will sometimes be so kind—as a friend”.

“I must not ask you to write? No, no.” She corrected herself a little wildly. “I forgot you had loads of other friends, and I only count as one—amongst—amongst—the people—you would like to help.”

And as he still said nothing she began to be ashamed and unreasonably angry, she knew not at what. Perhaps it was because his face told the tale which just at that crisis he was priding himself on concealing.

“Go—go!” she cried, in a voice that was almost imperious in its haughtiness. “Put the seas between us. You are right! Let me never look on your face again!”

.

He saw it all ; the rush of shame which suddenly dyed her cheeks with crimson, and the hand which shook as it held the roses ; and he thought all the better of her for the sharp words with which she dismissed him, being, as he was, one of those men who could not have “loved at all, loved he not honour more”.

“ No, I cannot regret that I did not let myself be weak ; one always despises weakness. I have to face my life and to hope that she will soon forget,” he thought, as he found himself in the train bound from Calais to Lucerne and afterwards to Rome. He had forgotten Stephen lately. Some of the letters which had come to him ought to have made him anxious about the lad. And now he turned to thoughts of him. It was characteristic of Norman Colville always to make a way out of his own troubles by busying himself with the affairs of others.

.
If he could have known that Althea's character was

made of sterner and stronger stuff than he had any suspicion of, he might have found it more difficult to leave her without a word at this crisis. Yet the utterance of that word might have lowered him in her esteem, and it was precisely because he did not utter it that he stood so high in her opinion.

“He took the whole blame upon himself in his anxiety to shield me from the breath of scandal,” she said to herself, never guessing that the ordeal had been as severe for him as for her. “But I have but one thing to do. It was not for me to consult him or any other man as to whether there are circumstances which might justify me in breaking a promise which I should never have made. Nobody else can be any judge for me in such a case of conscience. To have carried out my engagement even before he came would have been wrong ; for there would always have been the possibility of meeting some other man whom I might have loved, even after my marriage. And now it would be a

sin, for I already know that I have that capability of loving, and I do not love Percy."

Like most girls who have been luxuriously brought up, she was decidedly wanting in courage when she had to face poverty. She and her mother had known its dreary realities in times past—its hard, unpoetical, unsavoury side during one period of their lives, and for both of them there could be no coquetting with its unsubstantial and imaginary attractions. Althea could never be like an enthusiastic schoolgirl, dreaming of love in a cottage with jasmine and woodbine twining round lattice windows. To be alone in some vague and beautiful world with everything lovely around her—lapped in the heart of Nature and with the sense of loving and being loved by some other being—they two being all in all to each other, was a sentimentalism which might have commended itself to some other inexperienced woman. But Althea knew too much of the sordid misery which might be connected with the loss of this world's goods. Just at the present time

it would not only mean the loss of comfort and refinement—with scarcely enough to eat and scanty meals ill served in a dirty lodging-house—but it would mean the ignominy of debt and the exposure of her mother as well as herself to the scorn of evil tongues.

“Still I *must* speak out—it is the better alternative of the two—I should be wicked not to speak out.”

Once more her favourite lines from Wordsworth—the lines on Duty—occurred to her :—

Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,
And the most ancient Heavens through thee are fresh and
strong.

But they had quite ceased to comfort her. The Heavens seemed to be as brass above her, and life itself scarcely worth living any longer.

“It is only in books that the people die conveniently who are tired of life,” she said, trying to argue with herself.

Then a great pity arose in her heart for her

mother. It had been so natural, so perfectly natural, that Mrs. Le Geyt should rejoice in the future prepared for her daughter.

"And I shall have to give her the bitterest disappointment I have ever given her in her life," thought the girl, as she decided that it would be more merciful to break the truth to her at once. For there was also the captain, whose defection might be made certain if the Le Geyts had to leave at once. The girl did not venture to say that that in itself would be a desirable consummation. The whole episode about the captain, with its comical as well as its tragical side, had jarred upon her nerves.

She came in from the garden to the breakfast-room before Colville left. She had presence of mind enough to know that it would look better, for his sake as well as for hers, that she should not be conspicuous among the little crowd of servants and friends who had collected to see him off.

Breakfast was a movable meal always at Melton

Hall. Many of the elder ladies (amongst whom was Mrs. Le Geyt) preferred to have it served to them in their bedrooms, and the younger dropped in to it as they pleased ; so that the feeling of surprise which had been caused by Colville's sudden departure was not at first apparent. Before luncheon it was easy to be ready with the explanation, suggested by the artist himself, that he had now given all the superintendence that was necessary to the building of the " House of Germanicus," and that it would be better for him to return in the autumn to finish the frescoes when the walls were thoroughly dry.

It had been agreed between Lord Melton and Norman Colville that the frescoes need never be finished at all, and that the idea of such a building had always been absurd (it was already spoken of by outsiders as " Melton's Folly "); but it was not necessary to inform the world of the decision.

Althea heard the sound of the wheels rasping on the gravel, and knew that Norman had gone, as

she made the pretence of eating some breakfast ; but she did not look up or wave her " adieu " as Irene Caterlot did. She was keenly conscious of the fact that Irene's eyes were scanning her face, but did not as yet guess that jealousy had played an active part in the comedy.

The one burst of misty sunshine had already disappeared, and that dull dreariness had set in which is so often a precursor of rain.

Althea felt thankful. The greyness and blackness of the skies suited her own feeling of helpless despair about the future as she went up into her room and knelt down by her little bed. No words of prayer would come, but she rose determined to act. In certain moments of hopeless despondency, as she remembered, to throw her helplessness on the Helpful, and to try to do the right thing, was to pray. She had learnt simplicity and straightforwardness from Norman Colville, whose character was so direct and simple.

" I must try to quiet this dull pain of separation

which something tells me will go on for ever, by leaving myself no time to think of it," she said, as she made up her mind to go at once to her mother.

It struck her that Mrs. Le Geyt was looking different from usual, with an absence of the sprightly manner which had distinguished her lately. She was sitting with her back to the light, and it did not escape Althea's notice that she had drawn the lace curtains more closely across the window. But the eyes of the young are cruelly keen; and it was impossible for the girl to help noticing the signs of recent weeping on the red eyelids and swollen cheeks, in spite of the efforts which had been made to efface the traces of tears with rose water and toilet powder.

It immediately occurred to her that Melton had possibly already spoken on the subject of Norman's abrupt departure to Mrs. Le Geyt, and she was thankful to him for clearing the way.

The trembling of which she had been conscious when she ascended the stairs, and which had made

her feel as if she must catch hold of the banisters to steady her steps, suddenly ceased ; and she was no longer paralysed with fear as she said :—

“ Mother, dear, do not be angry. I have been a coward too long. I cannot marry Lord Melton. I do not love him ; sometimes I think I even despise him ; and no power on earth shall make me marry him.”

Mrs. Le Geyt did not answer, and gaining courage from her silence Althea went on, speaking with the intensity of conviction :—

“ You perhaps think I ought to go on with it ; that it is my duty to bear the suffering, which, by my hasty promise, I brought upon myself ; to go on with it for your sake as well as mine. But I have thought of all that. Two wrongs do not make a right. There are women who go on with it when they have made a mistake of that sort, who are influenced by money and position, and who consent to wear a sort of Nessus shirt beneath their embroidered garments, and never let the world

know how they have to suffer. But why—why should I be one of those women?”

Suddenly it struck her that, though she was speaking in a stronger voice, her mother did not hear what she was saying, or heard it vaguely, as if she were in a trance.

She had to raise her voice louder, and repeat what she had said.

“Women should not be sacrificed,” she said; “such sacrifices should be prevented, they lead to wickedness. Marriage without love is a sacrilege.”

Suddenly Mrs. Le Geyt burst into helpless tears, but even then it was some little while before Althea understood that the tears were for some other grief of her own,—a grief so overwhelming that it had made her forget for the time her *rôle* of skilful generalship, and the necessity for controlling her daughter.

It was as if she had been dreaming, and was but partially awakened from her dream, when she saw Althea standing above her, looking as she had

never seen her look before, with an odd assumption of power in her young face, and heard her say :—

“ It is only during the last few weeks that I have come to see how it would be a sin for me to marry without love, and have learnt somehow to realise with horror that a marriage such as that proposed to me must involve not only suffering, but personal degradation ”.

“ Has *everybody* gone mad ? ” asked the poor lady through her tears. “ This is the second maniac this morning.”

Althea continued, without asking for any explanation of the mysterious allusion :—

“ In a girl ignorant of the world such a marriage might be excused ; but she who enters into it with her eyes open, as mine have been opened *now*, commits a terrible wickedness.”

Then, for the first time, poor Mrs. Le Geyt was thoroughly awake to see the look of strongly decided character for the first time in her daughter's

face ; and to know that she had escaped from her jurisdiction, most probably for ever.

She had always been used to letting off her anger in little minor bursts, which seemed to agree with her constitution, and by which she warded off the contrary blasts of every-day life. But she had no reserve force sufficient to meet this great one, which was like the shattering of walls around her, by a sudden explosion of dynamite, too exhausting and bewildering. She was jarred out of her usual affected, manœuvring, managing, hectoring self ; and felt—as she began to whimper in her helplessness and excitement—that the time had come when she would never be able to manage again.

“Forgive me, dear mother,” said the younger woman, into whose hands the reins of government had so unexpectedly passed ; “but if you can see things a little in my way, I expect we shall be happier together than we have been for a long time. Forgive me, oh forgive me, but I think I

have borne all this long enough! I can see through it. I could see through it even when I was a child, when it hurt me, and when I could not fight against it. But I am a woman *now*, and you cannot make a cat's-paw of me any longer."

Then Mrs. Le Geyt began to whimper and complain of her wicked, undutiful child. But Althea knelt down beside her, and took her two hands in hers, stroking them and trying to comfort her, as she said:—

"It is different".

"How different?" asked a complaining voice, half stifled by tears.

"Altogether different! I can never explain it—never hope to make you understand it—not if I were to speak to you for ever."

"There is Lord Melton."

"We must tell him the truth; he will act like a man of honourable feeling."

"I do not know what you mean," cried Mrs. Le Geyt, wringing her hands.

“It was never honourable of me to have engaged myself to him at all.”

The poor lady continued to shed feeble tears. She was hard hit, and might have complained under other circumstances that she was insulted by her own child.

The climax was reached when Althea mildly hinted that she trusted she would not mind leaving the Hall soon—she “might object to leaving friends”.

“Do you allude to Captain Nugent?” asked the broken-down Metternich, rapidly becoming hysterical; “have you not heard that he is a common swindler?”

It was the farce again coming after the tragedy. With some difficulty Althea gathered from the explanation which was given, with stifled sobs and broken interjections, that a discovery had been made on the previous night which had obliged Captain Nugent to leave the house with greater rapidity and less dignity than Norman Colville had left it.

She had long known that the captain was one of those parasites who support themselves by trading on the hospitality of their friends. For years past he had gone from house to house, being generally welcome at any house-party for a variety of little accomplishments which enabled him to do many things a little, whilst nothing which he could do was sufficiently good to make it of any marketable value. He could sing a comic song, help with amateur acting, tell a good after-dinner story, play a fair game of billiards, take a hand at whist, hunt a little and shoot a little. In all these ways he had made himself an agreeable companion, and it was only lately that tales had been whispered about to his disadvantage.

Lord Melton had heard one of these stories from an irate old lady, who prided herself on being a collector of enamels. She declared that after the captain had been staying with her, she had missed some of her most valuable treasures; that on speaking about it to a trustworthy friend, that

friend had declared that the same disaster had happened to herself ; and that she, too, had her suspicions, especially as 'Captain Nugent was fond of boasting of a little " box " which he possessed at Shanklin, in the Isle of Wight, which was filled with curiosities from all parts of the world.

Melton had laughed good-naturedly when first he heard the gossip. He did not hesitate to dismiss the story even with scorn, comparing the gossip of " the old cats " to the feline duets which grate on one's ears disturbing the darkness of night ; but when Irene Caterlot's gossip on another subject had dropped like poison into his ears, his optimistic mood had changed, and he was ready to believe almost anything to the discredit of his fellow-creatures.

He also was a collector, and had his cabinets filled with articles of *vertu* ; and when, after his ride with Irene, he found, much to his astonishment, that he could not sleep, he lit a candle, and donning dressing-gown and slippers, determined

to try and turn his thoughts by looking at some of his precious things. He was not a money lover ; but he liked to think of how much his collection would realise, if ever it should have to be sold at a sale at Christie's. He thought he would like to part with some of the prettiest things even now, were it only that they reminded him of the old days when he had been fond of presenting Althea with a few of the antique toys which had once embraced other rounded arms and dimpled necks.

"One would have thought," he said to himself, "that she would not have cared for those amulets and baubles; but apparently she did." For once in the course of conversation, when some one had ventured to make fun of the age when women held court round their triumphal toilet tables, adorned with ribbons and laces, she had immediately retorted that she would ask Mr. Colville to design one of those tables for *her*. She would like, she said, to have it all over again—the patches and the

powders ; the sedan chairs with gilded panels ; the harpsichords with pictures ; and the delightful little inlaid bureaus for writing scented notes.

“ I am sure Mr. Colville could draw some of the patterns for me, and Melton would have them made and covered with dainty things. He is very good,” she had added with a sort of sigh, “ in letting me have whatever I like. *That* was the proper age for women, when pretty things made them happy,—not this. This is too full of pretension and clamour.”

It had only been one of her changing moods, and counted for very little—probably, indeed, it had been assumed to hide the restlessness from which she was just then suffering. But the recollection of it added a sting which quickened the keenness of the present search.

The larger things were safe enough. There was a bronze by John of Bologna and a vase by Cellini which would have been missed at a cursory glance.

But when he came to open drawers, and to look over some of the smaller articles, he immediately missed a rare little specimen of ironwork from Venice, a small but very valuable lamp which he had secured with considerable difficulty at Pompeii, and a little statuette—a pretty thing in alabaster—which he had brought home in one of his last journeys from Florence. He was furiously angry, and his present mood had made him suspicious. He spent no more time in looking over his curios, but shut the drawer with a bang which contained mementoes of the frivolities of the eighteenth century, and which was generally called the “women’s drawer”. Alas, poor women! their little playing purses, their patch-boxes, their tiny embroidered slippers, and all sorts of other trinkets—memorials of the vanities of the past—lay there for folks to laugh at, while they themselves were mouldering in their graves.

But Melton did not think of the pathos of it, as he closed it with no gentle hands and swore that

he would find out the offender and punish him. For he immediately suspected Nugent, and determined to get hold of the captain's valet. Had he been his usual easy-going self, Lord Melton would have hesitated to bribe a confidential servant. But the bank-notes did their work; and the fellow confessed that the missing treasures were quietly reposing in his master's travelling trunks, whence he took them to restore to their rightful owner; explaining with a wicked grin that it was a sort of blackmail levied by Captain Nugent from every house that he honoured with his presence, and that since he (the valet) had found out his doings he had determined to quit his service. Under other circumstances Melton would doubtless have passed more lightly over the offence, pitying the "poor devil" who valued beautiful things as well as irreproachable dinners, and whose sense of *meum* and *tuum* had so unfortunately become confused.

But a crime which in former days might have

seemed to him venial, and which at the worst might have been attributed to kleptomania by a host so indifferent and indulgent as Melton, was now treated, as it deserved, as a crime of serious dimensions.

The man was ordered to leave the house ; and though Melton did not prosecute, he hinted that he should advise other people to do so.

“He will be kicked out of the army,” sobbed Mrs. Le Geyt ; “the thing will never be forgotten. He had a sunstroke in India, and then when he fell in love with me, I suppose he became bewildered.”

Althea thought it wiser not to ring for the maid, but herself plied the sufferer with hartshorn and sal volatile. It was only when her mother continued to sob and to stare in an odd way in front of her, while she repeated, “Oh, the double wedding, it will never come off now ; the silver grey satin which was to have been my wedding dress suited me to perfection ! And oh, the miserable debts,

whatever shall we do to clear them?" that she began to be seriously alarmed, and to find it necessary to send for a doctor.

END OF VOL. II.



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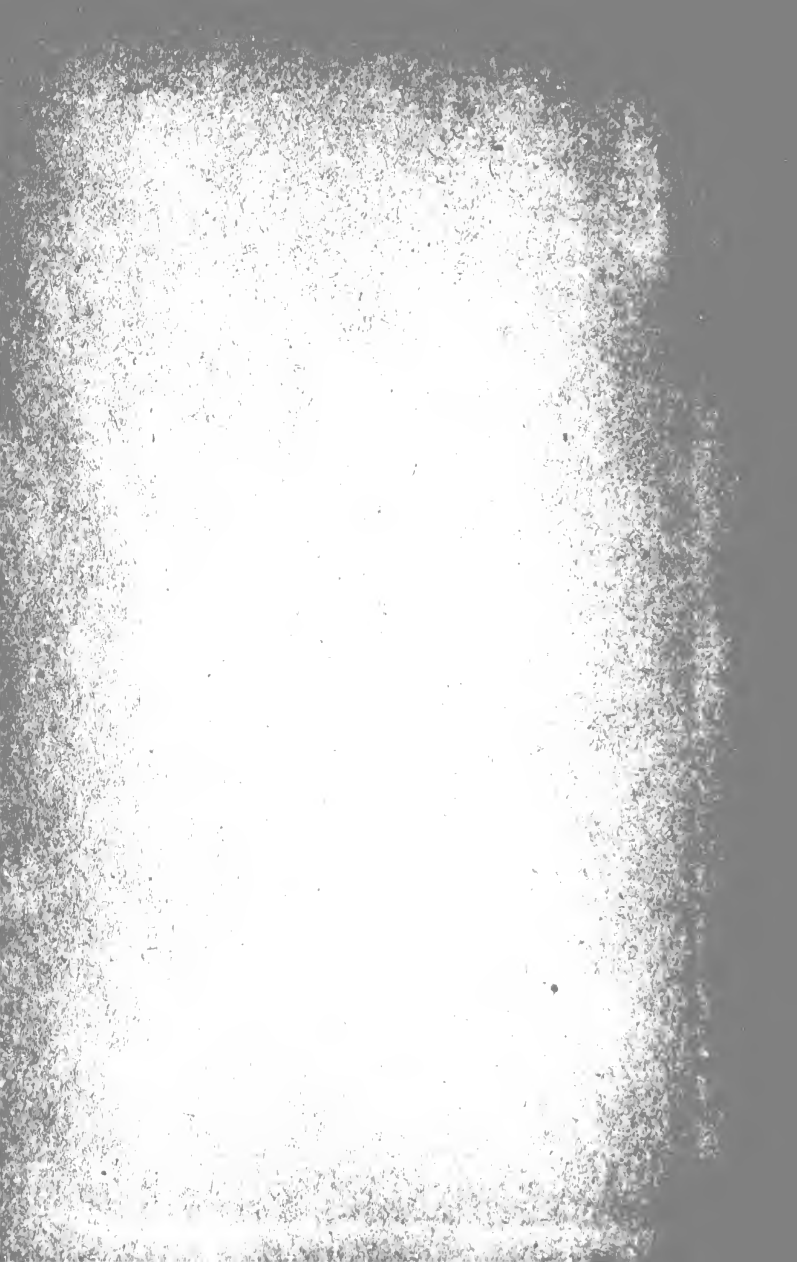
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